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***POEMS : 1924-1933***



*Archibald MacLeish*

**POEMS, 1924-1933**



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## FOREWORD

THIS book is not a 'collected edition' of my poems nor does it purport to trace my development as a poet. My development as a poet is of no interest to me and of even less interest, I should suppose, to anyone else. What I have done here has been to select from poems already published and from poems not yet published, those pieces I can now reread without embarrassment. The test has, I confess, no objective value. But it has the advantages of practicality and honesty. The truth is that all artists who continue to be engaged in the practice of their arts resent and dislike their past accomplishments. Only those who have completed their work will stand, with as much complacency as they can find, upon the record. To the rest, because their minds are upon new work with new problems and new technique, old work with its stale problems and its abandoned technique is distasteful. The moral may well be that the poet should not make his own selection. But if he is to make it, I know no test he can apply, short of the pomposities of the critical canon, which will serve him as well as his own uneasiness.

Such a method of selection does not, of course, justify the publication of a book. The justification in this case is the fact that most of the volumes from which these poems have been taken are not now, or will soon cease to be, available. Rather than reprint a number of small books, some of them containing work I do not wish to see reprinted, it has seemed best to make a single book.

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

CONWAY, MASSACHUSETTS, 1933



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***POEMS : 1924-1933***



# POEMS : 1924-1933

## THE HAMLET OF A. MACLEISH

*No man living but has seen the king his father's ghost. None alive that have had words with it. Nevertheless the knowledge of ill is among us and the obligation to revenge, and the natural world is convicted of that enormity...*

*In the old time men spoke and were answered and the thing was done clean in the daylight. Now it is not so.*



### 1

FROM these night fields and waters do men raise,  
Sailors from ship, sleepers from their bed,  
Born, mortal men and haunted with brief days,  
Their eyes to that vast silence overhead.  
They see the moon walk slowly in her ways  
And the grave stars and all the dark outspread.  
They raise their mortal eyelids from this ground:  
*Question it...*

*Elsinore.  
A platform  
before the  
castle.*

*What art thou...*

**And no sound.**

### 2

**Ha, but the sun among us...**

### 3

Ha, but the great sun  
Shouts in the shouldering leaves and the grasshoppers  
Scatter before him. Ho, but his brass  
Voice is the voice of the beater of horses.  
He roars from the splashed sea driving the  
Nude girls through the surf, striking their  
Golden rumps with the hand flat, deriding  
Shyness with lewd words. He is loud  
In the blown blue sky as the laughter of  
Fed kings under arbors

*The same: a  
room of state.  
He is reproved  
his melan-  
choly by the  
uncle-father.*

Ha, but the sun among us... wearers of  
Black cloths, bearers of secrets!  
The jay jeer of the sun in the ear of our  
Pain... and the nudge of the blunt pink  
Thumb troubling the pride of despair in us...

Ha, but the sun in our air

We stand in the still earth and the sun comes  
Swelling among us with large light, with the  
Browsing of bees about him, with flattering  
Tree sound. He is tall. He reveals the  
Dark to us (He is informed in these matters)  
'Behold!' he mouths in the gilt twigs.  
He advises our souls with the blabbed loose  
Light over water. He declaims the spangles of  
Glass in the high ways. He reproves us with

Shining. Ho, he repeats the proverbs of  
Brisk leaves to enliven the laugh in us.  
He lays his hands on our sex to persuade us of  
Happiness under the sea noon

*How is it that the cloud still hangs on thee?*

*Why seems it so — particular — with thee?*

*Seems, Madam!...*

Ha, we are preached by the  
Loud mouth, by the blooming of brightness.  
We are admonished with flares. ‘Get over it!’  
‘Cease,’ he instructs us, ‘to feel the emotions of  
Misery! Be bright boys! Console yourselves!’

Ah, but the sun in our sky!

*I shall in all my best obey you...*

Only

We have these dreams!

Only —

the old have announced us the  
Irremediable woe, the ill  
Long done, lost in the times before memory.

But men have known

The secret a long time. Men, forgotten,  
Few, keepers of lean goats on the mountains,  
Knew in the old time the standing before us of  
Strangeness under the clear air...

*The same. Horatio, Bernardo, Marcellus. He is informed of the apparition seen upon the wall.*

There have been men a long, long time that knew this.

The words come to us

Far off, faint in our ears, confused. They have told us of  
Signs seen by night and the vanishing signals.

They have told how the lights change. They have told of the  
ominous

Stir over the leaves and the showing among them of  
Mysteries hiding a dark thing...

Now is Bleheris speaking in the book.

I am beside the fire. The old page

Wrinkles with light. A log falls. The wind

Swings from tree to tree in the wet night.

Now is Bleheris speaking:

*Horatio: '... till I may deliver... This marvel to you...'*

... and all that day

Seaward and down from ridge to ridge and the

Pines oak and the oaks birch and the birch trees

Pine again rooting in coarse sand, the horse track

Swallowed behind, the jays ahead of me screaming,

And I by the ridge rode on: and the wind changed with

Flaws from westward, cold in the sun, and a sound  
Echoing surf from the leaves: and the steep land  
Fell and I saw the sea.  
And by the sea was a ship but no man in her.  
And sail was set on the ship and I led the beast by a  
Rock's bridge and I cut rope and the wind was  
Off shore smelling at first of the furze root,  
Afterward cold: and the boom jibed over and  
She moved, wind in the sail top, rolling to the long  
Swell, the land against the wind, the skystain  
Spilling from trough to trough of the dead waves.  
And she cleared the lee with the light and the wind freshened and  
Night came. Thence north until dawn and at dawn  
Hills and a morning tower in the sun:  
Then nothing. And the wind held all that day  
Heaping the wave tops westward, and all night  
The wind was with us but the second morning  
Hauled south and drove her, the lee rail  
Free by a strake, the wake washed out by the sea-scud.  
And all that day I held her and at dark  
Luffed to have reefed her but she went about,  
Heeled and came up half foundered running off  
East by north with the wind aft and the waves  
Taking her stern, the lift logged with the bilge water.  
That was the third night and the morning stormy,  
Rain and the wind gone east, the geer wet,  
The bow sheer down with water. And I slept  
And woke past sunset and I saw the sky

Gold and against it black and the black, land:  
And the scud blew over it blurring the golden light.  
And all that night the surf was through the sea mist:  
The pine tops combing through the fog at dawn.  
And I struck the sea with the oars but the ship lifted,  
Grinding on gravel, and the bow fell off  
Waiting the seventh wave and leaned and rode with it  
Beam-on high on the beach and the wave drew  
Down and she held the shingle. And I rode  
And climbed through rock-scrub inland to a marsh  
And past the marsh a forest and till night  
Tunneled in tree-dark riding and saw neither  
Glebe nor fence, fallow nor cow track, only  
Dog foot, wolf, nor birds but three birds silent,  
Nor any live thing other but the bat,  
Nor sound but bat's sound nor the whine of flies.  
And the sun went down, red among beech trees, leaving  
High in the east, red, and no stars, and after  
Wind again, rain behind it, the first few  
Drops and the storm gust, thunder and the flash  
Casting no shadow. And I rode and there was  
One light lingered through the shut of dark.  
That light I followed. And I found a door:  
And past the door a church nave: and the church  
Empty, the sill moss growing on the stone:  
And one bare chapel. And I saw the light  
Bright in that chapel. And I saw a cup  
Crimson and burning and a flame of candles



Burning before it. And I knew that cup.

I knelt there thanking Jesus Christ.

And the wind

Sucked at the dead air and the water dripped

And the candle flame fell limp in the heavy dark *'In the dead waste  
and middle of the  
night...'*

And stiffened smoking and the moving leaves

Flapped in the window. So the night passed half

And I awake still staring at the cup

Forefeeling terror heard the beast go back,

Rear and a hoof ring striking, and looked up

And saw come inward at that window place,

Come from the plunging darkness into light,

Loose fingers groping, cropped, no arm there, grey,

The nails gone, shriveled, a dead hand, and droop

And close about the vessel. And the flame

Leapt and the night had all. Then silence. Then,

Loud till the stone shook, lamentable, long

As all the dead together, a great cry

Shrieking with laughter: afterward the sound

The horse made breathing. And I rose and ran

And mounted, leaning for the door, the stench

Of death, of flesh rot, choking me, rode out,

Spurred, and the wet leaves cold against my face,

Came to a clearing in the wood and reined

And saw the storm had passed there and the sky all

Clean, the stars out...

*'... both in  
time, Form of  
the thing, each  
word made  
true and good,  
The apparition  
comes.'*

... peace! I pray you all  
If you have hitherto concealed this sight...

the page  
Wrinkles with light. A log falls. The wind  
Swings from tree to tree in the wet night.

It may be then we are deceived in this.  
It may be this is other than we think  
And in our sleep... or secretly... or by  
The sudden blade of pain...

it may well be  
The thing is evil and these seeming soft  
Familiar gestures, these half signs, this shy  
Withheld warm look the earth has after day,  
This green, this ever blue, these stars — these stars —  
Are false and to deceive us. It may be

4

Night after night I lie like this listening.  
Night after night I cannot sleep. I wake  
Knowing something, thinking something has happened.  
I have this feeling a great deal. I have  
Sadness often. At night I have this feeling. *The platform.*  
Waking I feel this pain as though I knew  
Something not to be thought of, something unbearable.  
I feel this pain at night as though some *The King his*  
Terrible thing had happened. At night the sky *father's ghost ap-*  
*pears to him.*

Opens, the near things vanish, the bright walls  
Fall, and the stars were always there, and the dark  
There and the cold and the stillness. I wake and stand  
A long time by the window. I always think  
The trees know the way they are silent. I always  
Think some one has spoken, some one has told me.  
Reading the books I always think so, reading  
Words overheard in the books, reading the words  
Like words in a strange language. I always hear  
Music like that. I almost remember with music...  
This is not what you think. It is not that. I swim  
Every day at the beach under the fig tree.  
I swim very well and far out. The smell  
Of pine comes over the water. The wind blurs  
Seaward. And afternoons I walk to the phare.  
Much of the time I do not think anything;  
Much of the time I do not even notice.  
And then, speaking, closing a door, I see  
Strangely as though I almost saw now, some  
Shape of things I have always seen, the sun  
White on a house and the windows open and swallows  
In and out of the wallpaper, the moon's face  
Faint by day in a mirror; I see some  
Changed thing that is telling, something that almost  
Tells — and this pain then, then this pain. And no  
Words, only these shapes of things that seem  
Ways of knowing what it is I am knowing.  
I write these things in books, on pieces of paper.

I have written 'The wind rises...' I have written 'Bells  
Plunged in the wind...' I have written 'Like  
Doors...' 'Like evening...'

It is always the same: I cannot read what the words say.  
It is always the same: there are signs and I cannot read them.  
There are empty streets and the blinds drawn and the sky  
Sliding in windows. There are lights before  
Dawn in the yellow transoms over the doors.  
There are steps that pass and pass all night that are always  
One, always the same step passing...

I have traveled a great deal. I have seen at Homs  
The cranes over the river and Isfahan  
The fallen tiles in the empty garden, and Shiraz  
Far off, the cypresses under the hill.  
It is always the same. I have seen on the Kazvin road  
On the moon grey desert the leafless wind,  
The wind raging in moon-dusk. Or the light that comes  
Seaward with slow oars from the mouth of Euphrates.  
I have heard the nightingales in the thickets of Gilan,  
And at dawn, at Teheran, I have heard from the ancient  
Westward greying face of the wandering planet  
The voices calling the small new name of god,  
The voices answered with cockcrow, answered at dusk  
With the cry of jackals far away in the gardens.  
I have heard the name of the moon beyond those mountains.  
It is always the same. It is always as though some  
Smell of leaves had made me not quite remember;  
As though I had turned to look and there were no one.

It has always been secret like that with me.  
Always something has not been said. Always  
The stones were there, the trees were there, the motionless  
Hills have appeared in the dusk to me, the moon  
Has stood a long time white and still in the window.  
Always the earth has been turned away from me hiding  
The veiled eyes and the wind in the leaves has not spoken...

As now the night is still. As the night now  
Stands at the farthest off of touch and like  
A raised hand held upon the empty air  
Means and is silent

*Look! It waves me still...*

*I say Go on! Go on!*

As the whole night now  
Made visible behind this darkness seems  
To beckon to me...

5

*Where wilt thou lead me? Speak...*

We who have followed the clouds by day and by darkness  
The march of the wandering fires, we who have watched  
Bird signs in the sky, we who have questioned  
The doubtful flares, who have seen the gestures before us  
Of rain in the faint hills, who have heard the stammering  
Voices of thunder cry out to us, we who have come now  
A long road in the earth and the touching upon us

Of leaves like fingers on closed eyes and the taste of the  
Air strange in our nostrils,

where wilt thou lead us?

Where, at what extreme confine, wilt thou turn

*Mark me!*

*I will.*

*Another part of the plat-  
form: the truth revealed:  
he swears to be revenged.*

and speak!... and at these ears, O

At these mortal ear-pits speak to us?

Where wilt thou lead us? When wilt thou turn to us?

Not now? Not at this farthest verge? Not even

Here where the walls end and the ruinous tower

Leans with its uninhabitable black

Long builded stones above the ultimate sea?

We are alone now. There are none to hear.

I say we are alone upon this place.

Not even those are with us that in times

Past from the leaves of future-telling oaks,

From lowing heifers with all flowery horns,

From dolphin-ridden surf, from the deep pool

Spoke and would comfort us, the shining heel,

The seal-like swimming in the lovely air...

Where is thy tongue great spectre? Hast thou not

Answered to others that with hearts like ours

Followed thee, poets, speakers in the earth?

Didst thou not show them? For they were as sure,

Returning, as those men whom the great sea

Chooses for danger that do no more fear  
But inward certain leave the ill within  
And laugh for trivial bawdy cause and watch the  
New good living mellow earth and love it.  
Didst thou not tell them? ... and to us alone  
Art always secret, always the void sign,  
Always the still averted face whose unseen  
Shape makes sick men of us, haunted fools,  
Hag-ridden, blinking starers at the dark:  
Always this blank of silence like a dial  
That counts but will not keep our journey hours?  
Didst thou not tell these others? And why art thou  
Dumb but to us — or only mole numb speech  
That though we move from it, still under, still uneased,  
Repeats the indecipherable will  
And swears us to it? — though we know not what.

Where wilt thou lead us? Speak...

and suddenly the grey

Light and the wind in the branches

and the dawn

and all

Vanished, all at the scent of morning gone,  
And leaves now, and the green again, and where  
Our strained eyes started at the shape of fear  
Only the foolish stones

and yet

to hear

The voice still under in the changing air  
Cry 'Swear!' —

to see the measuring shadow on the wall

6

whether before have been

Men in these valleys...

Whether, beneath the sand here, beneath the shallow  
Earth are ashes, are fragments of jars, are the snow-worn  
Limbs of goddesses...

whether these now

I see in the dim air are men as I am

Wandering in this land

how shall I know?

How shall we speak together of this saying

You... You too... You too have felt... You also

At night waking... O at night!... And walking

Under the trees at evening... the trees!... You too!...

Whether these man faces

Come! Be honest.

Why will you not reply to me? Why do you always

Not understand what I say? I know your faces.

I know your names too. Nevertheless

You are not friendly to me; you are not of my

people.

*To him Rosencrantz and  
Guildenstern  
as friends.*



As for the place I go to —

we seek water.

The water here is salt. We have seen neither  
Birds nor green leaves since we found this country.

Why will you never listen? Why do you always  
Turn your eyes away when I speak to you? Tell me,  
Do none of you fear this place as I fear it?  
Who has sent you to me? You have been sent  
As spies. You are not friendly.

It may be

They are not there!...

or whether alone I

Of all men I only have passed these mountains.

7

Let there be shelters built in the wild fern  
For girls at their first sickness; also hovels  
Of green thorn on the hills for the times of women:  
Let there be laws inscribed for the keeping of chastity  
And knots made to number the days of the moon:  
Otherwise harm will come of it!

Why should we be

Ashamed if it were not so? Why should we sleep  
At noon with our knees bent in the darkness of plantains?

Why have we not uncovered ourselves in the sight  
Of grown girls nor gone by day through the paths  
To the named place in the straw under the fruit trees?

Let them be crushed with stones who are found together.  
Let their sex be consumed with lime and their bodies  
Burned on the roots of trees slabbered by cattle.

I tell you evil will come of it. Young girls  
Will draw us at dawn to the doors giving on  
silence

*Ophelia is put to  
trap him: Polonius and the uncle-  
father behind.*

And women with loosened garments will bring us in  
To the long room where the sun stands among columns:  
We shall be overheard: we shall speak aloud  
Telling them all! all!... and the vacant light,  
The bright void, the listening, idiot silence...

*Polonius,  
Claudius  
within.*

Love, I said, O my love! and I leaned upon her.  
I told her my heart in the soft fall of the plum blossoms.  
Suddenly there were leaves stirred in the wind,  
The sun was there! The sky stood there behind me!  
'Ha,' I said, 'Are you fair?' Look! 'Are you Honest?'  
I was betrayed. I rose from her.

*No, not I;*

*I never gave you aught.*

I tell you we must be dumb in the earth, else  
Evil will come of it: we shall be understood.  
The thing will be known before time and prevented.

Those who can speak with foolishness, let them be heard  
The rest shall be still, the rest shall watch and keep silence.

And the bodies of those that die of love upon childbed,  
Let them be buried in sand in a strange place.  
Let them be put away far from their people. ,  
It is a shameful thing. It has been forbidden

8

*Ay, sure, this is most brave;*

*That I...*

the live son of a dead father  
Doomed by my living breath itself to die

*Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words*

Why must I speak of it? Why must I always  
Stoop from this decent silence to this phrase  
That makes a posture of my hurt? Why must I  
Say I suffer?... or write out these words  
For eyes to stare at that shall soon as mine  
Or little after me go thick and lose  
The light too, or for solemn lettered fools  
To judge if I said neatly what I said? —  
Make verses!... ease myself at the soiled stool  
That's common to so swollen many!... shout  
For hearing in the world's thick dirty ear!...  
Expose my scabs!... crowd forward among those

*Hamlet...  
sole.*

That beg for fame, that for so little praise  
As pays a dog off will go stiff and tell  
Their loss, lust, sorrow, anguish!... match  
My grief with theirs!... compel the public prize  
For deepest feeling and put on the bays!...  
O shame, for shame to suffer it, to make  
A skill of harm, a business of despair,  
And like a barking ape betray us all  
For itch of notice

O be still, be still,  
Be dumb, be silent only. Seal your mouth.  
Take place upon this edge of shadow where  
The stale scene's acted to the empty skies.  
Observe the constellations. Watch the face  
Of heaven if it change to what it sees.  
Spy on the moon. Be cunning.

And be still.

We have that duty to each other here  
To fear in secret. For it is not known.  
The dreams that trouble us may be the shape  
Of ill within that by a faulted eye  
Abuses us to damn us.

*I'll have grounds  
More relative than this...*

Bearing the long lance, their banners before them *The Play.*  
 Frayed to the painted pole, the reins slung *The Crime*  
 Loose at the neck, knees guiding at withers, *enacted: the*  
 The Men, the Cloth-Clad Race, the People of Horses, *guilt shows...*  
 Move out of the East with the turning of seasons.  
 Westward they move with the sun. Their smoke hangs  
 Under the unknown skies at evening. The stars  
 Go down before them into the new lands.  
 Behind them the dust falls, the streams flow clear again,  
 Vultures rise from the stripped bones in the sand.  
 Slowly they move. The moons change. The sun changes.  
 The mares foal at their times. Girls are delivered 'The dumb  
 Screaming at dark in the skin tents. The harvests show enters.'  
 Of dry seeds fall in the grass by the horse way.  
 Westward they move. They come at last to the passes  
 Down to the hot lands. One after one they  
 Go by the stones: the scared horses, the women  
 Wearing the hammered stuff at their brown throats,  
 The babes slung at the left breast, the little ones  
 Riding the stumbling rumps, beating the flies off.  
 They march on the bare stones. They come to the rivers.  
 Before them cities stand in the cool of the date palms.  
 The walls go down. There is smoke. They wait for the summer  
 Watching the streams fail. They cross by the sand bar.  
 Their horses drown in the slime. The bodies of children  
 Float in the slow suck of the ooze. They go on.  
 They follow the desert quail, they perish for water.

Years pass. They come to the mountains. Beyond are  
Rich plains, the grasses blowing in sunlight.  
They march through green. They go on, thousands and thou-  
sands,

Taking the lands, killing the male, consuming  
The fat earth. They live in the land. They are lords there.  
They know the sun on their heads, the salt taste  
Of the rain drip on their faces. They know the smell  
Of their own flesh. They know with their heels what the earth is.  
They know how the earth was made and who has the law of it.  
They remember many things among them in common.  
They please each other with words: they touch with their fingers.  
They have their homes in the earth. They have named the  
mountains.

They kiss their hands to the sun and the moon. They know,  
When the leaves fall, the coming again of the summer.

Nevertheless they cannot be still. They go onward.  
They come to the land's end. The sea is before them.

They watch the sun go down in the infinite waters.  
Still they go on. They push to the surf fall. They build of  
Trees ships. They sail to the scattering islands.

They dwell at the last shores. Years pass. *'He poisons him i' the  
garden for 's estate. His  
name's Gonzago...'*  
They vanish.

They disappear from the light leaving behind them  
Names in the earth, names of trees and of boulders,  
Words for the planting of corn, leaving their tombs to  
Fall in the thickets of alders, leaving their fear  
Of the howling of dogs and the new moon at the shoulder,

Leaving the shape of the bird god who delivered  
Men from the ancient ill, and under the loam their  
Bronze blades, the broken shafts of their javelins.  
They vanish. They disappear from the earth.

And the sea falls

Loud on the empty beaches

and above...

*The King rises. Lights, lights, lights!*

Lights! Lights! The same stars! The same moon  
Still over the earth!

I say there were millions  
Died like that and the usual constellations.

10

MacLeish goes up the  
Stair built by the ancestors.

Night.

Sea-suck under in the well of stone.  
Rat-smell. Silence.

to the door

Where all

*O my prophetic soul*

Shall be revenged, where I shall speak.

*The uncle King at prayers.  
To him Hamlet sword in  
hand: withdraws.*

The streak of light along the floor.  
The shining on the promised sill.

Look now! I will! The door swings  
Open.

And go in....

*Now might I do it pat...*

Silence.

The candle fat upon the chair.  
The false equation on the obscene wall.

And look and there is no one there!

Giggle of the wind along  
The empty gutters of the sky.  
Snigger of the faint stars. Catcalls.

And look behind the broken chair.  
And look along the shadow on the  
Wall. Rat turds. Spiders.

There was no one ever there!  
And hear within the hollow room  
The clock tick Hurry! And behold  
Our eyes grow older in the glass.

What is it that we have to do?



Or play the strong boy, spit in the world's face, shout

Whore! Ghoul! Harpy! at her. Call her  
Jakes.

Call her corpse-eating planet, worm's gut.  
Show  
For once the true shape of her and say out

For once the true shape of her and say out

The thing she lives upon. Dig graves up. Pull

## The half too rotten mummies from their earth

**Like cyst from skin-crease. Crack the swollen tombs**

And heave the dead up stinking. O be hard!

Show her your own dead darling whose young bones

Rot through the jelly of their flesh beneath

This simpering pink rose...

*Peace! sit you down*

*And let me wring your heart...*

O play the strong boy with the rest of them!

**Be hard-boiled! Be bitter! Face the brassy**

Broad indecent fact and with ironical

## Contemptuous understanding take the world's

Scut in your hands and name it! Name its name!

Stare at her dugs with undeceived wise eyes until

The hypocrite green smile fades over and

**The guilt look shows! Be foul mouthed! Be blunt!**

Tell her the thing she feeds on and the thing

That dandles with her in the sweaty dark

To breed these beauties. Tell her of what seed

**She gets her womb up and what festering lust**

Lies stewing with her in the adulterous spring.  
Stare in her eyes! Sneer! Swagger! O be  
Hard!

and rise

and through the arras at the back  
Stab to the bloody braving hilt

and hear

The rat squeak after

hear the stuck dust fall!

12

Protect us help us forgive us help give

O have pity upon us

We that watch the lights of the other worlds

Openers of curtains eastward when the room

is dark

*Ophelia, crazed by  
the death of Polo-  
nius, laments, for-  
getting him, her  
loss.*

And alone in bed remembering our childhood

We that have felt the light of the moon on our faces...

Have pity upon us!

How should I your true love know

From another one?

By his silence in our hearts

By the empty room where he is gone.

Who will overhear our soliloquies?

We are alone in this place.

He is dead and gone, lady,  
He is dead and gone;  
At his head the no more winged air,  
At his heels — the stone.

They must tell us if it means well...

We have learned the answers, all the answers:  
It is the question that we do not know.  
We are not wise. We have a way of saying,  
What is the meaning of life? No one has answered us.  
We have looked behind the leaves too, all the leaves.

... we are alone too much...

We know what our fathers were but not who we are  
For the names change and the thorns grow over the houses.  
We recognize ourselves by a wrong laugh;  
By a trick we have of resembling something. Otherwise  
There are strange words and a face in a mirror.

We know

Something we have forgotten too that comforts us.

Yea-sayeth me this earth, this green  
Like music doth consent to me,  
The moon that standeth on the hill,  
The hollow sea.

How shall we learn what it is that our hearts believe in?  
And they say we all die but death is a mystery.  
Death is a gesture away from us. Death is a cry  
And no sound. They have their backs to us going.  
We do not know if earth stifles or infinite  
Winds have blown the words of it all away.

Come down into the crumbling loam,  
Come home into the curving wave,  
The dark, dear heart, will fondle thee,  
The earth will kiss thee in the grave.

*I hope all will be well. We must be patient...*

We must find a word for it men can say at night,  
And a face for the dark brow.  
We must find a thing we can know for the world changes.  
We must believe, for it is not always sure.

Why then, let's take it. Look, let's all smile once,  
All smile into each other's smiling, all  
As men smile into mirrors slowly smile...  
That's better. That's more comfortable.

We aren't  
Afraid now. Are we? Take it. There.  
Like  
that!

O! have pity upon us...

Why — what men were they that beneath the moon

Had mortal flagging hearts so passionate? *Ophelia's burial. He*

Who heaped these tombs? Who wept so? *quarrels with Laertes*  
*in the grave: protests*

Who piled up *his passion...*

These brags of marble anguish, these bronze groans,

These cromlech sorrows? Who had griefs so vast

That only mountains evened them, felt so

Deep pain, so suffered, with such iron tongue

Cried Wo that time still hears it? Why, what proud

What desperate nations were they that would leave

No legend after but the unwrit stones

That say they wept here? Or who painted then

These mutilated violent hands that still

Thrust back oblivion from the sad grave door?

What men were they that did protest so loud,

What broken, salty blooded, aching hearts

That could not cease in silence, what hoarse grief

That must be shouted at the narrow stars?

What dying men were they...

*Nay, an thou'lt mouth*

*I'll rant as well as thou...*

I'll swell my gullet,

Leap in the common grave and like a cock

Crow from the carrion. I'll tell the world.

I'll make a book of it. I'll leave my rare  
Original uncopied dark heart pain  
To choke up volumes and among the rocks  
Cry I! I! I! forever. Look,  
My face here. I have suffered. I have lost  
A child, a brother, friends. And do foreknow  
My own corruption. There are also stars  
But not to listen to. And the autumn trees  
That have the habit of the sun and die  
Beforetimes often. And at night. And skies.  
And seas. And evening. I can read in print  
But not these letters. And I was not born  
Without a death pain either but that's known,  
That's equal and we all go back. I had  
No friends but day times. No one called me. There was  
No one always underneath the bed.  
I'll tell you how I loved too, all my loves,  
My bed quilts, bolsters, blankets, my hot hands,  
My limbs, my rumps; my wretchedness: my lust,  
My weakness later and lascivious dreams.  
I'll tell you. Oh, I'll tell you. Lean your ear.  
By God, I'll match them at it. I'll be stripped  
Naked as eels are, gutted, laid on salt,  
Sold in the fish stalls. I'll be ox-chine nude,  
Quartered to cold bare bone. Look, behold me  
Bearing my dead son's body to the grave.  
See how I weep. How many of them all  
Have lost a son as I have? Or see here:

The Marne side. Raining. I am cold with fear.  
My bowels tremble. I go on. McHenry  
Hands me his overcoat and dies. We dig the  
Guns out sweating. I am very brave:  
Magnificent. I vomit in my mask.  
Or here. In Belgium. Spreading on my young,  
My three times buried brother's stony grave  
The bone-pale scented violets and feeling  
Yield at my knees the earth: and crying out  
Two words. In agony...

I'll tell it. Oh

I'll tell it. Louder! Shriek!

The sky's there!

14

It is time we should accept,  
Taught by these wordy fools, the staged  
Encounter and the game-pit rules.  
Whilst we have slept we have grown old.  
Age is a coldness leaching through.  
We must consent now as all men  
Whose rage is out of them must do,  
Cancel this bloody feud, revoke  
All tears, all pain, and to the drum,  
Trump, cannon and the general cheer  
Fight with a shining foil the feigned  
Antagonist for stoops of beer.  
Why should we want revenge of harms

*To whom the eloquent  
Osrick: communicates the  
invitation of Laertes to  
the Playful Bout...*

Not suffered in the public street,  
Or risk with sharp and hurting arms  
The real encounter kept at night  
Alone where none will praise our art?

It is time we should accept...

*Thou wouldst not think  
How ill all's here about my heart!!*



## SEAFARER



AND learn O voyager to walk  
The roll of earth, the pitch and fall  
That swings across these trees those stars:  
That swings the sunlight up the wall.

And learn upon these narrow beds  
To sleep in spite of sea, in spite  
Of sound the rushing planet makes:  
And learn to sleep against the ground.

## LINES FOR A PROLOGUE



THESE alternate nights and days, these seasons  
Somehow fail to convince me. It seems  
I have the sense of infinity!

(In your dreams, O crew of Columbus,  
O listeners over the sea  
For the surf that breaks upon Nothing —)

Once I was waked by the nightingales in the garden.  
I thought, What time is it? I thought,  
Time — Is it Time still? — Now is it Time?

(Tell me your dreams, O sailors:  
Tell me, in sleep did you climb  
The tall masts, and before you —)

At night the stillness of old trees  
Is a leaning over and the inertness  
Of hills is a kind of waiting.

(In sleep, in a dream, did you see  
The world's end? Did the water  
Break — and no shore — Did you see?)

Strange faces come through the streets to me  
Like messengers: and I have been warned  
By the moving slowly of hands at a window.

O, I have the sense of infinity —  
But the world, sailors, is round.  
They say there is no end to it.

# CINEMA OF A MAN



THE earth is bright through the boughs of the moon like a dead  
planet

It is silent it has no sound the sun is on it  
It shines in the dark like a white stone in a deep meadow  
It is round above it is flattened under with shadow

\* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \*

He sits in the rue St. Jacques at the iron table  
It is dusk it is growing cold the roof stone glitters on the gable  
The taxis turn in the rue du Pot de Fer  
The gas jets brighten one by one behind the windows of the stair

\* \* \* \*

This is his face the chin long the eyes looking

\* \* \* \*

Now he sits on the porch of the Villa Serbelloni  
He is eating white bread and brown honey

The sun is hot on the lake there are boats rowing  
It is spring the rhododendrons are out the wind is blowing

\* \* \* \*

Above Bordeaux by the canal  
His shadow passes on the evening wall  
His legs are crooked at the knee he has one shoulder  
His arms are long he vanishes among the shadows of the alder

\* \* \* \*

He wakes in the Grand Hotel Vierjahreszeiten  
It is dawn the carts go by the curtains whiten  
He sees her yellow hair she has neither father nor mother  
Her name is Ann she has had him now and before another

\* \* \* \*

This is his face in the light of the full moon  
His skin is white and grey like the skin of a quadroon  
His head is raised to the sky he stands staring  
His mouth is still his face is still his eyes are staring

\* \* \* \*

He walks with Ernest in the streets in Saragossa  
They are drunk their mouths are hard they say *qué cosa*

They say the cruel words they hurt each other  
Their elbows touch their shoulders touch their feet go on and  
on together

\* \* \* \*

Now he is by the sea at St.-Tropez  
The pines roar in the wind it is hot it is noonday  
He is naked he swims in the blue under the sea water  
His limbs are drowned in the dapple of sun like the limbs of the  
sea's daughter

\* \* \* \*

Now he is in Chicago he is sleeping  
The footstep passes on the stone the roofs are dripping  
The door is closed the walls are dark the shadows deepen  
His head is motionless upon his arm his hand is open

\* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \*

Those are the cranes above the Karun River  
They fly across the night their wings go over  
They cross Orion and the south star of the Wain  
A wave has broken in the sea beyond the coast of Spain

## THE TOO-LATE BORN



WE TOO, we too, descending once again  
The hills of our own land, we too have heard  
Far off — Ah, que ce cor a longue haleine —  
The horn of Roland in the passages of Spain,  
The first, the second blast, the failing third,  
And with the third turned back and climbed once more  
The steep road southward, and heard faint the sound  
Of swords, of horses, the disastrous war,  
And crossed the dark defile at last, and found  
At Roncevaux upon the darkening plain  
The dead against the dead and on the silent ground  
The silent slain —

# L'AN TRENTIESME DE MON EAGE



AND I have come upon this place  
By lost ways, by a nod, by words,  
By faces, by an old man's face  
At Morlaix lifted to the birds,

By hands upon the tablecloth  
At Aldebori's, by the thin  
Child's hands that opened to the moth  
And let the flutter of the moonlight in,

By hands, by voices, by the voice  
Of Mrs. Whitman on the stair,  
By Margaret's 'If we had the choice  
To choose or not —' through her thick hair,

By voices, by the creak and fall  
Of footsteps on the upper floor,  
By silence waiting in the hall  
Between the doorbell and the door,



By words, by voices, a lost way —  
And here above the chimney stack  
The unknown constellations sway —  
And by what way shall I go back?

# LE SECRET HUMAIN



IT WAS not God that told us. We knew  
Before, long before, long, long ago.  
We knew that tonight — or tomorrow —. We know  
Still — tomorrow. It is true that we know.

The incredulous surprise  
In the faces of the dead, in dead eyes:  
There was something still to happen —  
There was someone that was always going to come.

And the eyes of those that sleep,  
The puzzled eyes:  
There are promises the silence does not keep —  
And the dark has no replies.

Ah, we know  
As the wind blows,  
Not to the south, the north,  
Not to, not ever to, but toward.

We know beyond the doors we press and open,  
Beyond the smell of breakfast in the hall,

Beyond the soggy towel and the soap —  
Wait! We shall know all.

We that sit and think and talk,  
We that lie awake till late,  
We that walk beside the river:  
We can wait — O we can wait!

VOYAGE  
*for Ernest Hemingway*



HEAP we these coppered hulls  
With headed poppies  
And garlic longed-for by the eager dead

Keep we with sun-caught sails  
The westward ocean  
Raise we that island on the sea at last

Steep to the gull-less shore  
Across the sea rush  
Trade we our cargoes with the dead for sleep.

# THE NIGHT DREAM

*To R. L.*



NEITHER her voice, her name,  
Eyes, quietness neither,  
That moved through the light, that came  
Cold stalk in her teeth  
Bitten of some blue flower  
Knew I before nor saw.  
This was a dream. Ah,  
This was a dream. There was sun  
Laid on the cloths of a table.  
We drank together. Her mouth  
Was a lion's mouth out of jade  
Cold with a fable of water.  
Faces I could not see  
Watched me with gentleness. Grace  
Folded my body with wings.  
I cannot love you she said.  
My head she laid on her breast.  
As stillness with ringing of bees  
I was filled with a singing of praise.  
Knowledge filled me and peace.  
We were silent and not ashamed.

Ah we were glad that day.  
They asked me but it was one  
Dead they meant and not I.  
She was beside me she said.  
We rode in a desert place.  
We were always happy. Her sleeves  
Jangled with earrings of gold.  
They told me the wind from the south  
Was the cold wind to be feared.  
We were galloping under the leaves —

This was a dream, Ah  
This was a dream.

And her mouth  
Was not your mouth nor her eyes,  
But the rivers were four and I knew  
As a secret between us, the way  
Hands touch, it was you.

# MEMORY GREEN



YES and when the warm unseasonable weather  
Comes at the year's end of the next late year  
And the southwest wind that smells of rain and summer  
Strips the huge branches of their dying leaves

And you at dusk along the Friedrichstrasse  
Or you in Paris on the windy quay  
Shuffle the shallow fallen leaves before you  
Thinking the thoughts that like the grey clouds change

You will not understand why suddenly sweetness  
Fills in your heart nor the tears come to your eyes  
You will stand in the June-warm wind and the leaves  
falling  
When was it so before you will say With whom

You will not remember this at all you will stand there  
Feeling the wind on your throat the wind in your sleeves  
You will smell the dead leaves in the grass of a garden  
You will close your eyes With whom you will say  
Ah where

# ‘NOT MARBLE NOR THE GILDED MONUMENTS’



THE praisers of women in their proud and beautiful poems  
Naming the grave mouth and the hair and the eyes  
Boasted those they loved should be forever remembered  
These were lies

The words sound but the face in the Istrian sun is forgotten  
The poet speaks but to her dead ears no more  
The sleek throat is gone — and the breast that was troubled to  
listen  
Shadow from door

Therefore I will not praise your knees nor your fine walking  
Telling you men shall remember your name as long  
As lips move or breath is spent or the iron of English  
Rings from a tongue

I shall say you were young and your arms straight and your  
mouth scarlet  
I shall say you will die and none will remember you  
Your arms change and none remember the swish of your  
garments  
Nor the click of your shoe



Not with my hand's strength not with difficult labor  
Springing the obstinate words to the bones of your breast  
And the stubborn line to your young stride and the breath to  
    your breathing  
And the beat to your haste  
Shall I prevail on the hearts of unborn men to remember

(What is a dead girl but a shadowy ghost  
Or a dead man's voice but a distant and vain affirmation  
Like dream words most)

Therefore I will not speak of the undying glory of women  
I will say you were young and straight and your skin fair  
And you stood in the door and the sun was a shadow of leaves  
    on your shoulders  
And a leaf on your hair

I will not speak of the famous beauty of dead women  
I will say the shape of a leaf lay once on your hair  
Till the world ends and the eyes are out and the mouths broken  
Look! It is there!

## UNFINISHED HISTORY



WE HAVE loved each other in this time twenty years  
And with such love as few men have in them even for  
One or for the marriage month or the hearing of

Three nights' carts in the street but it will leave them:  
We have been lovers the twentieth year now:  
Our bed has been made in many houses and evenings:

The apple-tree moves at the window in this house:  
There were palms rattled the night through in one:  
In one there were red tiles and the sea's hours:

We have made our bed in the changes of many months — and  
the

Light of the day is still overlong in the windows  
Till night shall bring us the lamp and one another:

Those that have seen her have no thought what she is:  
Her face is clear in the sun as a palmful of water:  
Only by night and in love are the dark winds on it....

I wrote this poem that day when I thought  
Since we have loved we two so long together  
Shall we have done together — all love gone?

Or how then will it change with us when the breath  
Is no more able for such joy and the blood is  
Thin in the throat and the time not come for death?

# BROKEN PROMISE



**THAT** was by the door  
 Leafy evening in the apple trees  
 And you would not forget this anymore  
 And even if you died there would be these

Touchings remembered  
and you would return  
From any bourne from any shore  
To find the evening in these leaves  
To find my arms beside this door...

I think O my not now Ophelia  
There are not always (like a moon)  
Rememberings afterward  
(I think there are  
Sometimes a few strange stars upon the sky.)

## BEFORE MARCH



*THE gull's image and the gull*  
*Meet upon the water*

All day I have thought of her  
There is nothing left of that year

(There is sere-grass  
Salt colored)

We have annulled it with  
Salt

We have galled it clean to the clay with that one autumn  
The hedge-rows keep the rubbish and the leaves

There is nothing left of that year in our lives but the leaves of it  
As though it had not been at all

As though the love the love and the life altered  
Even ourselves are as strangers in these thoughts

Why should I weep for this?

What have I brought her?  
Of sorrow of sorrow of sorrow her heart full

*The gull*  
*Meets with his image on the winter water.*

DE VOTRE BONHEUR IL NE RESTE  
QUE VOS PHOTOS



SINCE...

And the rain since  
And I have not heard  
Leaf at the pane all winter  
Nor a bird's wing beating as that was

I have not seen  
All year your leaning face again

Since I have never wakened but that smell  
Of wet pine bark was in the room.



THERE will be little enough to forget  
The flight of crows  
A wet street  
The way the wind blows  
Moonrise: sunset  
Three words the world knows  
Little enough to forget

It will be easy enough to forget  
The rain drips  
Through the shallow clay  
Washes lips  
Eyes brain  
The rain drips in the shallow clay  
The soft rain will wash them away  
The flight of crows  
The way the wind blows  
Moonrise: sunset  
Will wash them away  
To the bare hard bones  
And the bones forget



## RETURN



WHEN shall I behold again the cold limbed bare breasted  
Daughters of the ocean I have not seen so long

Then it was always in sunshine  
then they were running

There was this thunder of surf then to the left of us  
Pines to the right  
cicadas

We came alone  
We left our people over the hill in the vineyard  
There were sea birds here when we came...

But I remember  
Sand there where the stones are and isles to seaward

It may be this was all in another land

Or it may be I have forgotten now how the sea was

# YOU, ANDREW MARVELL



AND here face down beneath the sun  
And here upon earth's noonward height  
To feel the always coming on  
The always rising of the night

To feel creep up the curving east  
The earthy chill of dusk and slow  
Upon those under lands the vast  
And ever climbing shadow grow

And strange at Ecbatan the trees  
Take leaf by leaf the evening strange  
The flooding dark about their knees  
The mountains over Persia change

And now at Kermanshah the gate  
Dark empty and the withered grass  
And through the twilight now the late  
Few travelers in the westward pass

And Baghdad darken and the bridge  
Across the silent river gone

And through Arabia the edge  
Of evening widen and steal on

And deepen on Palmyra's street  
The wheel rut in the ruined stone  
And Lebanon fade out and Crete  
High through the clouds and overblown

And over Sicily the air  
Still flashing with the landward gulls  
And loom and slowly disappear  
The sails above the shadowy hulls

And Spain go under and the shore  
Of Africa the gilded sand  
And evening vanish and no more  
The low pale light across that land

Nor now the long light on the sea

And here face downward in the sun  
To feel how swift how secretly  
The shadow of the night comes on...

# THE REVENANT



O TOO dull brain, O unperceiving nerves  
That cannot sense what so torments my soul,  
But like torn trees, when deep Novembers roll  
Tragic with mighty winds and vaulting curves  
Of sorrowful vast sound and light that swerves  
In blown and tossing eddies, branch and bole  
Shudder and gesture with a grotesque dole,  
A grief that misconceives the grief it serves,

O too dull brain — with some more subtle sense  
I know him here within the lightless room  
Reaching his hand to me, and my faint eyes  
See only darkness and the night's expanse,  
And horribly, within the listening gloom,  
My voice comes back, still eager with surprise.

# INTERROGATE THE STONES



Do you think

Death is an answer then?

Ah, to the How, the When,

Ah, to the hardest word.

But — have you heard

That other endless asking? Have you seen

The stale ironic question lean

At evening from a window-place

To face

The coming in of night, or stand

Where the sea breaks upon the broken land

Hour by hour listening?

Have you not seen

Old bones lie motionless between

The olives on the Tuscan hill

And still

Unanswered — still?

And do you think

Death is an answer? Do you think the Ask

O ask no more O ask  
Nothing, the hand upon the mouth, the mask  
With broken eyes — that thus  
Death answers us?

# INSOMNIA



BIRD from sleep thicket at night dark driven  
To leafless plain wherever secretly  
Unseen wings and bat twitter and no  
Sky but star gulf

                                cold on earth crouched hearken  
Her own heart beat her beating heart as though  
She heard far off and soft and numb the feet  
Of night come

                                and neither leaf nor grass  
To hide herself until the long night passes

Where shall we sleep O night-bewildered bird?

# SALUTE



O SUN! Instigator of cocks!

Thou...

Quickener! Maker of sound in the leaves

and of running

Stir over the curve of the earth like the ripple of

Scarlet under the skin of the lizard

Hunter!

Starter of westward birds!

Be heard

Sun on our mountains! Oh be now

Loud with us! Wakener let the wings

Descend of dawn on our roof-trees! Bring

Bees now! Let the cicadas sing

In the heat on the gummed trunks of the pine!

Make now the winds! Take thou the orchards!

(We that have heard the beat of our hearts in the silence  
And the count of the clock all night at our listening ears)



Be near!

Shake the branches of day on our roofs!

Oh

Be over us!



# EINSTEIN



STANDING between the sun and moon preserves  
A certain secrecy. Or seems to keep  
Something inviolate if only that  
His father was an ape.

Sweet music makes  
All of his walls sound hollow and he hears  
Sighs in the paneling and underfoot  
Melancholy voices. So there is a door  
Behind the seamless arras and within  
A living something: — but no door that will  
Admit the sunlight nor no windows where  
The mirror moon can penetrate his bones  
With cold deflection. He is small and tight  
And solidly contracted into space  
Opaque and perpendicular which blots  
Earth with its shadow. And he terminates  
In shoes which bearing up against the sphere  
Attract his concentration,

*Einstein upon a public  
bench Wednesday the  
ninth contemplates finity*

for he ends  
If there why then no farther, as, beyond  
Extensively the universe itself,

Or chronologically the two dates  
Original and ultimate of time,

Nor could Jehovah and the million stars  
Staring within their solitudes of light,  
Nor all night's constellations be contained  
Between his boundaries,

nor could the sun  
Receive him nor his groping roots run down  
Into the loam and steaming sink of time  
Where coils the middle serpent and the ooze  
Breeds maggots.

But it seems assured he ends  
Precisely at his shoes in proof whereof  
He can revolve in orbits opposite  
The orbit of the earth and so refuse  
All planetary converse. And he wears  
Cloths that distinguish him from what is not  
His own circumference, as first a coat  
Shaped to his back or modeled in reverse  
Of the surrounding cosmos and below  
Trousers preserving his detachment from  
The revolutions of the stars.

*Einstein descends the  
Hartmannsweilerstrasse*

His hands  
And face go naked and alone converse  
With what encloses him, as rough and smooth  
And sound and silence and the intervals

Of rippling ether and the swarming motes  
Clouding a privy: move to them and make  
Shadows that mirror them within his skull  
In perpendiculars and curves and planes  
And bodiless significances blurred  
As figures undersea and images  
Patterned from eddies of the air.

Which are  
Perhaps not shadows but the thing itself  
And may be understood.

*Einstein provisionally before  
a mirror accepts the hy-  
pothesis of subjective reality*

### Decorticate

The petals of the enfolding world and leave  
A world in reason which is in himself  
And has his own dimensions. Here do trees  
Adorn the hillside and hillsides enrich  
The hazy marches of the sky and skies  
Kindle and char to ashes in the wind,  
And winds blow toward him from the verge, and suns  
Rise on his dawn and on his dusk go down  
And moons prolong his shadow. And he moves  
Here as within a garden in a close  
And where he moves the bubble of the world  
Takes center and there circle round his head  
Like golden flies in summer the gold stars.

*...rejects it*

Disintegrates.

For suddenly he feels  
The planet plunge beneath him, and a flare  
Falls from the upper darkness to the dark  
And awful shadows loom across the sky  
That have no life from him and suns go out  
And livid as a drowned man's face the moon  
Floats to the lapsing surface of the night  
And sinks discolored under.

So he knows  
Less than a world and must communicate  
Beyond his knowledge.

*Einstein unsuccessfully after lunch attempts to enter, essaying synthesis with what's not he, the Bernese Oberland*

Outstretched on the earth  
He plunges both his arms into the swirl  
Of what surrounds him but the yielding grass  
Excludes his finger tips and the soft soil  
Will not endure confusion with his hands  
Nor will the air receive him nor the light  
Dissolve their difference but recoiling turns  
Back from his touch. By which denial he can  
Crawl on the earth and sense the opposing sun  
But not make answer to them.

Put out leaves  
And let the old remembering wind think through  
A green intelligence or under sea

Float out long filaments of amber in  
The numb and wordless reverie of tides.

In autumn the black branches dripping rain  
Bruise his uncovered bones and in the spring  
His swollen tips are gorged with aching blood  
That bursts the laurel.

But although they seize  
His sense he has no name for them, no word  
To give them meaning and no utterance  
For what they say. Feel the new summer's sun  
Crawl up the warmed relaxing hide of earth  
And weep for his lost youth, his childhood home  
And a wide water on an inland shore!  
Or to the night's mute asking in the blood  
Give back a girl's name and three notes together!

He cannot think the smell of after rain  
Nor close his thought around the long smooth lag  
And falter of a wind, nor bring to mind  
Dusk and the whippoorwill.

*Einstein dissolved in violins  
invades the molecular  
structure of F. P. Paepke's  
Sommergarten. Is repulsed*

But violins  
Split out of trees and strung to tone can sing  
Strange nameless words that image to the ear  
What has no waiting image in the brain.

She plays in darkness and the droning wood  
Dissolves to reverberations of a world  
Beating in waves against him till his sense  
Trembles to rhythm and his naked brain  
Feels without utterance in form the flesh  
Of dumb and incommunicable earth,  
And knows at once, and without knowledge how,  
The stroke of the blunt rain, and blind receives  
The sun.

When he a moment occupies  
The hollow of himself and like an air  
Pervades all other.

But the violin  
Presses its dry insistence through the dream  
That swims above it, shivering its speech  
Back to a rhythm that becomes again  
Music and vaguely ravel into sound.

*To Einstein asking at the  
gate of stone none opens*

So then there is no speech that can resolve  
Their texture to clear thought and enter them.

The Virgin of Chartres whose bleaching bones still wear  
The sapphires of her glory knew a word —  
That now is three round letters like the three  
Round empty staring punctures in a skull.  
And there were words in Rome once and one time  
Words at Eleusis.



Now there are no words  
Nor names to name them and they will not speak  
But grope against his groping touch and throw  
The long unmeaning shadows of themselves  
Across his shadow and resist his sense.

*Einstein hearing behind  
the wall of the Grand  
Hôtel du Nord the stars  
discovers the Back Stair*

Why then if they resist destroy them. Dumb  
Yet speak them in their elements. Whole,  
Break them to reason.

He lies upon his bed  
Exerting on Arcturus and the moon  
Forces proportional inversely to  
The squares of their remoteness and conceives  
The universe.

Atomic.

He can count  
Ocean in atoms and weigh out the air  
In multiples of one and subdivide  
Light to its numbers.

If they will not speak  
Let them be silent in their particles.  
Let them be dead and he will lie among  
Their dust and cipher them — undo the signs  
Of their unreal identities and free  
The pure and single factor of all sums —  
Solve them to unity.

## Democritus

Scooped handfuls out of stones and like the sea  
Let earth run through his fingers. Well, he too,  
He can achieve obliquity and learn  
The cold distortion of the winter's sun  
That breaks the surfaces of summer.

*Einstein on the terrasse of  
The Acacias forces the se-  
cret door*

## Stands

Facing the world upon a windy slope  
And with his mind relaxes the stiff forms  
Of all he sees until the heavy hills  
Impend like rushing water and the earth  
Hangs on the steep and momentary crest  
Of overflowing ruin.

## Overflow!

Sweep over into movement and dissolve  
All differences in the indifferent flux!  
Crumble to eddyings of dust and drown  
In change the thing that changes!

## There begins

A vague unquiet in the fallow ground,  
A seething in the grass, a bubbling swirl  
Over the surface of the fields that spreads  
Around him gathering until the green  
Boils and under frothy loam the rocks  
Ferment and simmer and like thinning smoke  
The trees melt into nothing.

Still he stands  
Watching the vortex widen and involve  
In swirling dissolution the whole earth  
And circle through the skies till swaying time  
Collapses crumpling into dark the stars  
And motion ceases and the sifting world  
Opens beneath.

When he shall feel infuse  
His flesh with the rent body of all else  
And spin within his opening brain the motes  
Of suns and worlds and spaces.

*Einstein enters*

Like a foam  
His flesh is withered and his shriveling  
And ashy bones are scattered on the dark.  
But still the dark denies him. Still withstands  
The dust his penetration and flings back  
Himself to answer him.

Which seems to keep  
Something inviolate. A living something.

# SENTIMENTS FOR A DEDICATION



NOT to you  
Unborn generations  
Irrefutable judges of what must be true  
Infallible reviewers of neglected reputations

(‘Posterity’  
The same critics  
Professor Philip in Doctor Phlap’s goatee  
The usual majority of female metics)

Not to you (though Christ  
Is my sure witness  
The fame I’ve got has not in all respects sufficed  
And rediscovery would have its fitness)

Not to you these books  
I choose the living  
I’ll take (I’ve taken) the blank brutal looks  
You keep your sympathetic too late learned too generous for-  
giving

I speak to my own time  
To no time after

I say Remember me Remember this one rhyme  
When first the dead come round me with their whispering  
laughter

Those of one man's time  
They shall be dead together  
Dos that saw the tyrants in the lime  
Ernest that saw the first snow in the fox's feather

Stephen that saw his wife  
Cummings his quick fillies  
Eliot the caul between the ribs of life  
Pound — Pound cracking the eggs of a cock with the beautiful  
sword of Achilles

I speak to those of my own time  
To none other  
I say Remember me Remember this one rhyme  
I say Remember me among you in that land my brothers

O living men Remember me Receive me among you.

## YACHT FOR SALE



MY YOUTH is  
Made fast  
To the dock  
At Marseilles  
Rotting away  
With a chain to her mast

She that saw slaughters  
In foreign waters

She that was torn  
With the winds off the Horn

She that was beached in the bleaching environs  
Of sirens

She that rounded the Cape of Good Hope  
With a rope's aid

She's fast there  
Off the Cannebière

**It's easy to see  
She was frail in the knee  
And too sharp in the bow —  
You can see now.**

## ..... & FORTY-SECOND STREET



BE PROUD New-York of your prize domes  
And your docks & the size of your doors & your  
dancing

Elegant clean big girls & your  
Niggers with narrow heels & the blue on their  
Bad mouths & your bars & your automo-  
biles in the struck steel light & your  
Bright Jews & your sorrow-sweet singing  
Tunes & your signs wincing out in the wet  
Cool shine & the twinges of  
Green against evening...

When the towns go down there are stains of  
Rust on the stone shores and illegible  
Coins and a rhyme remembered of  
swans say  
Or birds or leaves or a horse or fabulous  
Bull forms or a falling of gold upon  
Softness



Be proud City of Glass of your  
Brass roofs & the bright peaks of your  
Houses

Town that stood to your knees in the  
Sea water be proud be proud  
Of your high gleam on the sea

Do they think

Town

They must rhyme your name with the name of a  
Talking beast that the place of your walls be remembered \*

# IMMORTAL HELIX



HEREUNDER Jacob Schmidt who, man and bones,  
Has been his hundred times around the sun

His chronicle is endless — the great curve  
Inscribed in nothing by a point upon  
The spinning surface of a circling sphere.

Dead bones roll on.

## VERSES FOR A CENTENNIAL



THE birthplace of Mr. William Shakespeare author  
Of Timon and other poetry including  
‘Who sees his true love on her naked bed  
Teaching the sheets’ including also sonnets  
‘To one of one still such and ever so’  
Or Lincoln’s in Kentucky where they say,  
From This to That: Think of it! (If they could!)  
Or Dante Alighieri’s — Godi Fiorenza —  
Has not been found. They cannot fix their marbles  
Just where the year twelve hundred sixty five  
Rolled up the Arno or where time and Troy  
And Stratford crossed each other. On this spot —  
    Where now, where now along the great ecliptic  
    Traced by a wandering planet that unwinds  
    Space into hours? —  
                    Upon this very spot  
The year of Christ one thousand five six four —  
    And of Erasmus four score seventeen  
    And Leonardo one one two —  
                                    was born —

**To P. Ovidius Naso and the queen  
Lying in Florida on a Venetian bed  
Carved with the loves of Venus —  
William Shakespeare.**

# MOTHER GOOSE'S GARLAND



AROUND, around the sun we go:  
The moon goes round the earth.  
We do not die of death:  
We die of vertigo.

## MARCH



LET us think of these  
Winter-stiffened trees

(Posthumously sucking pap  
From the pores of a dead planet

Like the bristles on a butchered pig)  
Every stalk and standing twig

Swollen with delightful sap

# CORPORATE ENTITY



THE Oklahoma Ligno and Lithograph Co  
Of Maine doing business in Delaware Tennessee  
Missouri Montana Ohio and Idaho  
With a corporate existence distinct from that of the  
Secretary Treasurer President Directors or  
Majority stockholder being empowered to acquire  
As principal agent trustee licensee licensor  
Any or all in part or in parts or entire

Etchings impressions engravings engravures prints  
Paintings oil-paintings canvases portraits vignettes  
Tableaux ceramics relievos insculptures tints  
Art-treasures or masterpieces complete or in sets —

The Oklahoma Ligno and Lithograph Co  
Weeps at a nude by Michael Angelo.

## CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS



LET us await the great American novel

Black white yellow and red and the fawn-colored  
Bastards of all of them, slick in the wrist, gone  
Yank with a chewed cigar and a hat and a button,  
Talking those Inglish Spich with the both ends cut:  
And the New York Art and the real South African Music  
(Written in Cincinnati by Irish Jews)  
Dutchmen writing in English to harry the Puritans:

Puritans writing in Dutch to bate the Boor...

Let us await            the great            American novel

And the elder ladies down on the Mediterranean  
And the younger ladies touring the towns of Spain  
And the local ladies Dakota and Pennsylvanian  
Fringing like flowers the silvery flood of the Seine

And the Young Men writing their autobiographies  
And the Old Men writing their names in the log —

Let us await (Can we wait?) the American novel.



## MEN OF MY CENTURY LOVED MOZART



CHANGED by this last enchantment of our kind  
That still had power with our Protean souls —  
This keeping charm that could constrain the mind  
As nymphs in amber or in woody boles  
Of oak the live limbs by the spell confined —  
Changed to ourselves by this enforcing hand  
We lay like silver naked Proteus on the sand:

The pelt fell from us and the sea-cow's shape  
The fish's scarlet the shark's wrinkled skin  
The seal's eyes and the brine encircled nape  
The foam's evasion the down-diving fin —  
All cheats and falsehoods of our vain escape:  
Changed to ourselves, sea-sleeked and dripping yet  
Our limbs lay caught and naked in the taking net.

The pure deliberate violence of the sun  
Burned for an instant at our wincing eyes:  
We gasped in air and struggled on the stone:  
Our knees were twisted in the knotted plies:  
Then suddenly to roping sand would run

The cord that bound us on that blazing shore:  
We plunged in sea and breathed the grateful dark once more:

Never did we hear Mozart but the mind  
Fished from its feeding in some weedy deep  
And wound in web that would more closely bind  
The more it altered from itself did keep  
One moment in that bond its perfect kind —

Never when we would question it but shone  
Through breaking cordage silver and the god was gone.

# AETERNA POETAE MEMORIA



THE concierge at the front gate where relatives  
Half after two till four Mondays and Fridays  
Do not turn always to look at the hospital  
Brown now and rusty with sunlight and bare  
As the day you died in it, stump of the knee gangrenous  
'Le ciel dans les yeux' and the flea-bitten priest with the wafer  
Forgiving you everything — You! — the concierge hadn't  
Heard of you: Rimbaud? Comment s'écrit ça, Rimbaud?

But Sidis the, well, American dealer in manuscripts —  
Sidis has sold the original ink decree:  
Verlaine versus Verlaine [Divorce] with your name as  
How do we say between gentlemen — anyway all  
OK, the facts, the actual story...

Men remember you, dead boy — the lovers of verses!

## AGAINST ILLUMINATIONS



AVOID, you strollers in the dark street,  
You side by side touching at knee and shoulder,  
You going your own way your own ways together  
And who knows where, avoid these shafts of light,

These oblongs out of doorways, the thin jet  
Under the window shade, beneath the shutter,  
The match flame squirting at the dark, the glimmer  
Between bent fingers where the old men sit —

Avoid the gas-light on the winding stair.  
She who goes beside you is not there.

# THE END OF THE WORLD



QUITE unexpectedly as Vasserot  
The armless ambidextrian was lighting  
A match between his great and second toe  
And Ralph the lion was engaged in biting  
The neck of Madame Sossman while the drum  
Pointed, and Teeny was about to cough  
In waltz-time swinging Jocko by the thumb —  
Quite unexpectedly the top blew off:

And there, there overhead, there, there, hung over  
Those thousands of white faces, those dazed eyes,  
There in the starless dark the poise, the hover,  
There with vast wings across the canceled skies,  
There in the sudden blackness the black pall  
Of nothing, nothing, nothing — nothing at all.



# THE POT OF EARTH



*These [the gardens of Adonis] were baskets or pots filled with earth in which wheat, barley, lettuces, fennel, and various kinds of flowers were sown and tended for eight days, chiefly or exclusively by women. Fostered by the sun's heat, the plants shot up rapidly, but having no root they withered as rapidly away, and at the end of eight days were carried out with the images of the dead Adonis and flung with them into the sea or into springs.*

SIR JAMES G. FRAZER, *The Golden Bough*

## PART ONE

*'For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a  
god-kissing carrion, — Have you a daughter?'*

*'I have, my lord.'*

*'Let her not walk i' the sun —'*



### THE SOWING OF THE DEAD CORN



SILENTLY on the sliding Nile  
The rudderless, the unoared barge  
Diminishing and for a while  
Followed, a fleck upon the large  
Silver, then faint, then vanished, passed  
Adonis who had once more died  
Down a slow water with the last  
Withdrawing of a fallen tide.



That year they went to the shore early —  
They went in March and at the full moon



The tide came over the dunes, the tide came  
To the wall of the garden. She remembered standing,  
A little girl in the cleft of the white oak tree —  
The waves came in a slow curve, crumpling  
Lengthwise, kindling against the mole and smoldering  
Foot by foot across the beach until  
The whole arc guttered and burned out. Her father  
Rested his spade against the tree. He said,  
The spring comes with the tide, the flood water.  
Are you waiting for spring? Are you watching for the spring?  
He threw the dead stalks of the last year's corn  
Over the wall into the sea. He said,  
Look, we will sow the spring now. She could feel  
Water along dry leaves and the stems fill.  
Hurry, she said, Oh, hurry. She was afraid.  
The surf was so slow, it dragged, it came stumbling  
Slower and slower. She tried to breathe as slowly  
As the waves broke. She kept calling, Hurry! Hurry!  
Her breath came so much faster than the sea —



One night it rained with a south wind and a warm  
Smell of thawed earth and rotting straw and ditches  
Sodden with snow and running full. She lay  
Alone in the dark and after a long time

She fell asleep and the rain dripped in the gutter,  
Dripped, dropped, and the wind washed over the roof  
And winter melted and she felt the flow  
Of the wind like a smooth river, and she saw  
The moon wavering over her through the water —

And after the rain the brook in the north ravine  
Ran blood-red — after the rain they found  
Purple hepaticas and violets.  
Stained crimson —

Are the waters fed  
In the hill side?

She heard the drip, the beat  
Of seas gathering underground. She heard  
The moon moving under Perkins Street —  
Why do you circle here, O lost sea bird!  
Under the root of the pine-tree, under the stone  
She heard the red surf breaking.

This occurred  
When she was thirteen years —

Oh, she felt  
Ill. It was horrible. She thought of one  
Dead, and the weeping...

In March the snows melt  
Dribbling between the shriveled roots till they brim  
The soaked soil, till the moon comes, until  
The moon compels them; and the surf at the sea's rim  
Breaks into scarlet and the pine roots spill

Rivers of blood. There was blood upon her things.  
She brought home violets enough to fill  
The yellow bowl with the pattern of pigeon wings —

I am afraid of the moon. I am afraid of the moon still.



The sound of the sea breaking beyond the wall  
Was surd, flat, stopped as the voice of a deaf woman.  
Dead leaves tiptoed in the path.  
The trees listened —  
And she saw the blind moon climb through the colorless air  
Through the willow branches. She could feel the moon  
Lifting the numb water, and the sea fill.  
She thought, The spring will come now overflowing  
The clean earth. And what will the pine cone do,  
The skulls and kernels that the winter gathered —  
What will they do —

We are having a late spring, we are having  
The snow in April, the grass heaving  
Under the wet snow, the grass  
Burdened and nothing blossoms, grows  
In the fields nothing and the garden fallow,  
And now the wild birds follow

The wild birds and the thrush is tame.  
Well, there is time still, there is time.  
Tomorrow there will be tomorrow  
And summer swelling through the marrow  
Of the cold trees.

Wait! Let us wait!

Let us wait until tomorrow. The wet  
Snow wrinkles, it will rot,  
It will molder at the root  
Of the oak-tree. Wait!

Oh, wait, I will gather

Grains of wheat and corn together,  
Ears of corn and dry barley.  
But wait, but only wait. I am barely  
Seventeen: must I make haste?  
Tomorrow there will be a host  
Of crocuses and small hairy  
Snowdrops. And why, then, must I hurry?  
There are things I have to do  
More than just to live and die,  
More than just to die of living.  
I have seen the moonlight leaving  
Twig by twig the elms and wondered  
Where I go, where I have wandered.

I have watched myself alone  
Coming homeward in the lane  
When I seemed to see a meaning

In my going or remaining  
Not the meaning of the grass,  
Not the dreaming mortal grace  
Of the green leaves on the year —

And why, then, should I hear  
A sound as of the sowers going down  
Through blossoming young hedges in the dawn —  
Winter is not done.



There were buds on the chestnut-trees, soft, swollen,  
Sticky with thick gum, that seemed to press,  
To thrust from the cold branches, to start under  
The impulse of intolerable loins —  
The faint sweet smell of the trees sickened her.  
She walked at the sea's edge on the blank sand.

Certainly the salt stone that the sea divulges  
At the first quarter does not fructify  
In pod or tuber nor will the fruiterer cull  
Delicate plums from its no-branches — Oh,  
Listen to me for the word of the matter is in me —  
And if it heats in the sun it heats to itself  
Alone and to none that come after it and the rain  
Impregnates it not to the slightest — Oh, listen,

You who lie on your backs in the sun, roots,  
Roses among others taking the rain  
Into you, vegetables, listen — the salt stone  
That the sea divulges does not fructify.  
It sits by itself. It is sufficient. But you —  
Who was your great-grandfather or your mother's mother?



One of those mild evenings when you think  
Spring is tomorrow and you can smell the earth  
Smoldering under wet leaves and there's still  
A little light left over the tree top  
And you stand listening —

So she closed the gate  
And walked up Gloucester Street and coming home  
It was pitch dark at the railroad station they  
Jostled against her O excuse me excuse me  
And somebody said laughing she couldn't hear  
Her throat pounded something she ran ran —  
What do you want? What do you want me to do?  
What can I do? Can I put roots in the earth?  
Can leaves grow out of me? Can I bear leaves  
Like the thorn, the lilac —

Why did you not come?  
Why did you let me go then if you knew?



They seemed to be waiting,  
The willow-trees by the wall,  
Fidgeting with the sea wind in their branches,  
Unquiet in the warm air.  
She stood between them. She said,  
You who have set your candles toward the sea  
Two nights already and no sound  
Only the water,  
Tell me, do the dead come out of the sea?  
Does the spring come from the sea?  
Does the dead god  
Come again from the water?

The willow-trees stirred in the wind,  
Stilled,  
Stirred in the wind —

She said, It may be he has come,  
It may be he has come and gone, and I not knowing —



Easter Sunday they went to Hooker's Grove,  
Seven of them in one automobile  
Laughing and singing.

Sea water flows  
Over the meadows at the full moon,  
The sea runs in the ditches, the salt stone  
Drowns in the sea.

And someone said, Look! Look!  
The flowers, the red flowers.

Shall we go  
Up through the Gorge or round by Ryan's place?  
I'll show you where the wild boar killed a man.  
I'll show you where the...

Who is this that comes  
Crowned with red flowers from the sea? Who comes  
Into the hills with flowers?

On the hill pastures  
She heard a girl calling her lost cows.  
Her voice hung like a mist over the grass,  
Over the apple-trees.

She bit her mouth  
To keep from crying.

On the third day  
The cone of the pine is broken, the eared corn  
Broken into the earth, the seed scattered.  
The bridegroom comes again at the third day.  
The sowers have come into the fields sowing.



Well, at the Grove there was a regular crowd  
And a band at the Casino, so they ate  
Up in the woods where you could hear the music  
And the dogs barking, and after lunch she lay  
Out in the open meadow. She could feel  
The sun through her dress —

Don't you want to dance?

They're all dancing — that wonderful tune —  
Are you listening? Aren't you listening?

The band -

Start stuttered and  
Oh, won't you?

No —

Just a little while. Just a little bit —

No! Oh, No! Oh, No!

Far, far away

The singing on the mountain. She could hear  
The voices singing, she could hear them come  
With songs, with the red flowers. They have found him,  
They have brought him from the hills —

Why, it was wonderful! Why, all at once there were leaves,  
Leaves at the end of a dry stick, small, alive  
Leaves out of wood. It was wonderful,  
You can't imagine. They came by the wood path  
And the earth loosened, the earth relaxed, there were flowers  
Out of the earth! Think of it! And oak-trees

Oozing new green at the tips of them and flowers  
Squeezed out of clay, soft flowers, limp  
Stalks flowering. Well, it was like a dream,  
It happened so quickly, all of a sudden it happened —

## PART TWO

### THE SHALLOW GRASS



THE plow of tamarisk wood which is shared with black copper  
And drawn by a yoke of oxen all black  
Drags in the earth.  
The earth is made ready with copper,  
The earth is prepared for the seed by the feet of oxen  
That are shod with brass.



They said, Good Luck! Good Luck! What a handsome couple!  
Isn't she lovely though! He can't keep his hands  
Off of her. Ripe as a peach she is. Good Luck!  
Good-bye, Good-bye —

They took the down express,  
The five-five. She had the seat by the window —  
He can't keep —

She sat there looking out  
And the fields were brown and raw from the spring plowing,

The fields were naked, they were stretched out bare,  
Rigid, with long welts, with open wounds,  
Stripped —

                    In the flat sunlight she could see  
The fields heave against the furrows, lift,  
Twist to get free —

                                    — his hands —

  Why, what's the matter?

We're almost there now, only half an hour.  
We'll have our supper in our rooms. I've taken  
The best room, what they call the bridal chamber —

What they call — what do they call it? —

  And I dressed up

All in these new things not a red ribbon  
You ever had on before and mind you keep  
The shoes you were married in and all to go  
Into a closed room with a bed in it,  
To lie in a shut chamber

                                    What they call —

Something

                    the chalked letters

                                    does he say

That

            I wonder

                    or what —

                                    She held his hand  
Against her breast under the flowers. She felt

The warmth of it like the warmth of the sun driving  
Downward into her heart.

And all those fields  
Ready, the earth stretched out upon those fields  
Ready, and now the sowers —

What is this thing we know that they have not told us?  
What is this in us that has come to bed  
In a closed room?



I tell you the generations  
Of man are a ripple of thin fire burning  
Over a meadow, breeding out of itself  
Itself, a momentary incandescence  
Lasting a long time, and we that blaze  
Now, we are not the fire, for it leaves us.

I tell you we are the shape of a word in the air  
Uttered from silence behind us into silence  
Far beyond, and now between two strokes  
Of the word's passing have become the word —  
That jars on through the night;

and the stirred air

Deadens,  
is still —



They lived that summer in a furnished flat  
On the south side of Congress Street and no  
Sun, but you could look into the branches  
Of all those chestnut-trees, and then they had  
A window-box, but the geraniums  
Died leaving a little earth and the wind  
Or somehow one June morning there was grass  
Sprouting —

How does your garden grow, your garden  
In the shallow dish, in the dark, how does it grow?  
Tomorrow we bear the milk corn to the river,  
Tomorrow we go to the spring with the pale stalks:  
Has your garden ripened?

She used to water them  
Morning and evening and the blades grew  
Yellow a sort of whitey yellowy all  
Fluffy

hairs from a dead skull  
they say  
The skulls of dead girls —

Won't it let you die  
Even, burgeoning from your bones, your dead  
Bones, from your body, not even die, not just  
Be dead, be quiet?

What is this thing that sprouts  
From the womb, from the living flesh, from the live body?  
What does it want? Why won't it let you alone  
Not even dead?

Why, look, you are a handful  
Of fat mold breeding corruption, a pinch  
Of earth for seed fall —

How does your garden grow?

Hot nights the whole room reeked with the fetid smell  
Of chestnut flowers, the live smell, the fertile  
Odor of blossoms. She half drowsed. She dreamed  
Of long hair fragrant with almonds growing  
Out of her dead skull, she dreamed of one  
Buried, and out of her womb the corn growing.



Construe the soundless, slow  
Explosion of a summer cloud, decipher  
The sayings of the wind beneath the pantry door,  
Say when the moon will come, when the rain will follow

Unless the rain comes soon the colored petals  
Sheathing the secret stigma of the rose  
Will fall, will wither, and the swollen womb  
Close, harden, upon a brittle stalk  
Seal up its summer, and the hollyhock,  
The broom, the furze, the poppy will become,

Their petals fallen, all their petals fallen,  
Peascods — seedboxes — haws —

It should have rained when the moon  
Spilled out the old moon's shadow.  
Seven days I have been waiting for the rain now,  
The sound of water.  
Seven days I have been walking up and down in the house.  
There was nothing to do, there was nothing to do but wait,  
But wait, but walk and walk  
And at night hear  
The patter of dry leaves on the window and wake,  
And waking, think, The rain! Yes — and hear  
The patter of dry leaves.  
There was nothing to do, there was nothing to do but wait,  
But wait, but wait, but wait, and the wind whispering  
Something I couldn't understand beneath the door,  
Something that I wouldn't understand.  
And the grass stems  
Stiffening to bear the headed grain,  
The rose,  
The hawthorn  
Covering with bony fingers  
Their swollen wombs,  
The summer shriveling to husks, to shells,  
Peascods, seedboxes,  
The summer sucking through a withered straw  
Enough stale water for a few beans,



**For a handful of swelling peas in a sealed bladder,  
For the living something in a closed womb.**



**Upon the sand  
This brine, these bubbles —  
The wave of summer is drowned in the salt land.  
And I, the climbing tip  
Of that old ivy, time,  
To waver swaying over a blind wall  
With all  
Today to dream in,**

**and, behind,**

**The never-resting root  
Through my live body drives  
The living shoot,  
The climbing ivy-tip of time.**

I am a room at the end of a long journey  
The windows of which open upon the night  
Or perhaps  
Nothing —

I am a room at a passage end where lies  
Huddled in darkness one that door by door

Has come time's length through his old windy house  
For this —  
For what, then?

Neither.

I am a woman in a waterproof  
Walking beside the river in an autumn rain.  
Above the trolley bridge the market gardens  
Are charnel fields where the unburied corn  
Rots and the rattling pumpkin vines lift brittle fingers  
Warning — of what? — and livid, broken skulls  
Of cabbages gape putrid in a pond —

My face under the cold rain is cold  
As winter leaves that cover up the year.  
I feel the wind as the numb earth feels it.  
I feel the heavy seed in the warm dark  
And the spring ripening —



And what is this to be a woman? Why,  
To be a woman, a sown field.

Let us

Attribute a significance perhaps

Not ours to what we are compelled to be  
By being it:

as privately forestall  
The seed's necessity by welcoming  
The necessary seed;  
likewise prevent  
Death with the apothegm that all men die.  
Yes.

And then wake alone at night and lie here  
Stripped of my memories, without the chairs  
And walls and doors and windows that have been  
My recognition of myself, my soul's  
Condition, the whole habit of my mind,  
Yes, wake, and of the close, unusual dark  
Demand an answer, crying, What am I?  
Ah, What! A naked body born to bear  
Nakedness suffering. A sealed mystery  
With hands to feed it, with unable legs,  
With shamed eyes meaning — what? What do they mean  
The red haws out there underneath the snow,  
What do they signify?

Glory of women to grow big and die  
Fruitfully, glory of women to be broken,  
Pierced by the green sprout, severed, tossed aside  
Fruitfully —

Yes, all right, Yes, Yes,  
But what about me —

What am I —

What do you think

I am —

What do you take me for!

Snow, the snow —

When shall I be delivered?

When will my time come?

## *PART THREE*

### THE CARRION SPRING



THE flowers of the sea are brief,  
Lost flowers of the sea,  
Salt petal, bitter leaf,  
The fruitless tree—

The flowers of the sea are blown  
Dead, they blossom in death:  
The sea furrows are sown  
With a cold breath.

I heard in my heart all night  
The sea crying, Come home,  
Come home. I thought of the white  
Cold flowers of foam.



In March, when the snow melted, he was born.  
She lay quiet in the bed. She lay still,  
Dying.

Under the iron rumble  
Of the streets she heard the rolling  
Boulders that the flood tides tumble  
Climbing sea by sea the shoaling  
Ledges — she could hear the tolling  
Sea.

She lay alone there.

In the morning  
They came and went about her,  
Moving through the room. She asked them  
Whispering. They told her,  
He is here. She said, Who is it,  
Who is it that is born, that is here?  
She said, Do you not know him?  
Have you seen the green blades gathered?  
Have you seen the shallow grain?  
Do you know, — do you not know him?  
Laugh, she said, I am delivered,  
I am free, I am no longer  
Burdened. I have borne the summer  
Dead, the corn dead, the living  
Dead. I am delivered.  
He has left me now. I lie here  
Empty, gleaned, a reaped meadow,

Fearing the rain no more, not fearing  
Spring nor the flood tides overflowing  
Earth with their generative waters —  
Let me sleep, let me be quiet.  
I can see the dark sail going  
On and on, the river flowing  
Red with the melting of the snow:  
What is this thing we know? —

Under the iron street the crying  
Voices of the sea. Come home,  
Come to your house. Come home.

She heard

A slow crying in the sea, Come home,  
Come to your house —



Go secretly and put me in the ground —  
Go before the moon uncovers,  
Go where now no night wind hovers,  
Say no word above me, make no sound.  
Heap only on my buried bones  
Cold sand and naked stones  
And come away and leave unmarked the mound.  
Let not those silent hunters hear you pass:

Let not the trees know, nor the thirsty grass,  
Nor secret rain  
To breed from me some living thing again,  
But only earth —

For fear my body should be drowned  
In her deep silences and never found.



The slow spring blossomed again, a cold  
Bubbling of the corrupted pool, a frothy  
Thickening, a ferment of soft green  
Bubbling —

Who knows how deep the roots drink?  
They drink deep.

And you, what do you hope?  
What do you believe, walking  
Alone in an old garden, staring down  
Beneath the shallow surface of the grass,  
The floating green? What do you say you are?  
And what was she that you remember, staring  
Down through the pale grass, what was she?  
And what is this that grows in an old garden?

Listen, I will interpret to you. Look, now,  
I will discover you a thing hidden,



A secret thing. Come, I will conduct you  
By seven doors into a closed tomb.  
I will show you the mystery of mysteries.  
I will show you the body of the dead god bringing forth  
The corn. I will show you the reaped ear  
Sprouting.

Are you contented? Are you answered?

Come.

I will show you chestnut branches budding  
Beyond a dusty pane and a little grass  
Green in a window-box and silence stirred,  
Settling and stirred and settling in an empty room —

# ARS POETICA



A POEM should be palpable and mute  
As a globed fruit

Dumb  
As old medallions to the thumb

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone  
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown —

A poem should be wordless  
As the flight of birds

\* \* \*

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs

Leaving, as the moon releases  
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,  
Memory by memory the mind —

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs

\* \* \*

A poem should be equal to:  
Not true

For all the history of grief  
An empty doorway and a maple leaf

For love  
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea —

A poem should not mean  
But be

# IMMORTAL AUTUMN



I SPEAK this poem now with grave and level voice  
In praise of autumn of the far-horn-winding fall  
I praise the flower-barren fields the clouds the tall  
Unanswering branches where the wind makes sullen noise

I praise the fall it is the human season

now

No more the foreign sun does meddle at our earth  
Enforce the green and bring the fallow land to birth  
Nor winter yet weigh all with silence the pine bough

But now in autumn with the black and outcast crows  
Share we the spacious world the whispering year is gone  
There is more room to live now the once secret dawn  
Comes late by daylight and the dark unguarded goes

Between the mutinous brave burning of the leaves  
And winter's covering of our hearts with his deep snow  
We are alone there are no evening birds we know  
The naked moon the tame stars circle at our eaves

It is the human season on this sterile air  
Do words outcarry breath the sound goes on and on  
I hear a dead man's cry from autumn long since gone

I cry to you beyond upon this bitter air

## PONY ROCK

*For the memory of H. T. C.*



ONE who has loved the hills and died, a man  
Intimate with them — how their profiles fade  
Large out of evening or through veils of rain  
Vanish and reappear or how the sad  
Long look of moonlight troubles their blind stones —  
One who has loved them does not utterly,  
Letting his fingers loosen and the green  
Ebb from his eyeballs, close his eyes and go:

But other men long after he is dead  
Seeing those hills will catch their breath and stare  
As one who reading in a book some word  
That calls joy back but can recall not where —  
Only the crazy sweetness in the head —  
Will stare at the black print till the page is blurred.

## THE FARM



WHY do you listen, trees?  
Why do you wait?  
Why do you fumble at the breeze —  
Gesticulate  
With hopeless fluttering hands —  
Stare down the vanished road beyond the gate  
That now no longer stands?  
Why do you wait —  
Trees —  
Why do you listen, trees?

(1750)

Ephraim Cross drives up the trail  
From Worcester. Hepsibah goes pale  
At sumac feathers in the pines.  
The wooden wagon grunts and whines.  
Blunt oxen leaning outward lurch  
Over the boulders. Pine to birch  
The hills change color. In the west  
Wachusett humps a stubborn crest.  
Ephraim takes the promised land,  
Earth, rock and rubble, in his hand.

(1800)

Young sugar maples in a row  
Flap awkward leaves. Ripe acres blow  
In failing ripples to the blue  
Of hemlocks. Ephraim's house stands true  
Above the troubling of a brook.  
Ephraim's gravestones seem to look  
West of the Berkshires and still west.  
Hepsibah's stones turn back compressed  
And bitter silence toward the sea.  
Between, her sons sleep patiently.

(1871)

A blind door yawing to the snow  
Questions them in. They knock and go  
Through the old bedroom to the back.  
The kitchen door swings out a crack  
Framing Aunt Aggie in her chair —  
Dead as a haddock — ragged hair  
Scrawled over on her shriveled eyes.  
Since Monday morning, they surmise:  
Last of her name she was, and best  
Be lyin' up there with the rest.

(1923)

Plummets of moonlight thinning through  
Deep fathoms of the dark renew



Moments of vision and deflect  
Smooth images the eyes expect  
To images the brain perceives.  
Choked in a pine wood chafe the leaves  
Of aged maples, but the moon  
Remembers; and its shadows strewn  
Sidelong and slantingly restore  
Ephraim's trees about his door.

Why do you listen, trees?  
Why do you wait?  
Why do you fumble at the breeze —  
Gesticulate  
With hopeless fluttering hands —  
Stare down the vanished road beyond the gate  
That now no longer stands?  
Why do you wait, trees?  
Why do you listen, trees?

## ELEVEN



AND summer mornings the mute child, rebellious,  
Stupid, hating the words, the meanings, hating  
The Think now, Think, the O but Think! would leave  
On tiptoe the three chairs on the verandah  
And crossing tree by tree the empty lawn  
Push back the shed door and upon the sill  
Stand pressing out the sunlight from his eyes  
And enter and with outstretched fingers feel  
The grindstone and behind it the bare wall  
And turn and in the corner on the cool  
Hard earth sit listening. And one by one,  
Out of the dazzled shadow in the room  
The shapes would gather, the brown plowshare, spades,  
Mattocks, the polished helves of picks, a scythe  
Hung from the rafters, shovels, slender tines  
Glinting across the curve of sickles — shapes  
Older than men were, the wise tools, the iron  
Friendly with earth. And sit there quiet, breathing  
The harsh dry smell of withered bulbs, the faint  
Odor of dung, the silence. And outside  
Beyond the half-shut door the blind leaves  
And the corn moving. And at noon would come,

Up from the garden, his hard crooked hands  
Gentle with earth, his knees still earth-stained, smelling  
Of sun, of summer, the old gardener, like  
A priest, like an interpreter, and bend  
Over his baskets.

And they would not speak:  
They would say nothing. And the child would sit there  
Happy as though he had no name, as though  
He had been no one: like a leaf, a stem,  
Like a root growing —

## COOK COUNTY



THE northeast wind was the wind off the lake  
Blowing the oak-leaves pale side out like  
Aspen: blowing the sound of the surf far  
Inland over the fences: blowing for  
Miles over smell of the earth the lake smell in.

The southwest wind was thunder in afternoon.  
You saw the wind first in the trumpet vine  
And the green went white with the sky and the weather-vane  
Whirled on the barn and the doors slammed altogether.  
After the rain in the grass we used to gather  
Wind-fallen cold white apples.

### The west

Wind was the August wind, the wind over waste  
Valleys over the waterless plains where still  
Were skulls of the buffalo, where in the sand stale  
Dung lay of wild cattle. The west wind blew  
Day after day as the winds on the plains blow  
Burning the grass, turning the leaves brown, filling  
Noon with the bronze of cicadas, far out falling  
Dark on the colorless water, the lake where not

Waves were nor movement.

The north wind was at night

When no leaves and the husk on the oak stirs

Only nor birds then. The north wind was stars

Over the whole sky and snow in the ways

And snow on the sand where in summer the water was...

## MEMORIAL RAIN



AMBASSADOR PUSER the ambassador  
Reminds himself in French, felicitous tongue,  
What these (young men no longer) lie here for  
In rows that once, and somewhere else, were young —

All night in Brussels the wind had tugged at my door:  
I had heard the wind at my door and the trees strung  
Taut, and to me who had never been before  
In that country it was a strange wind blowing  
Steadily, stiffening the walls, the floor,  
The roof of my room. I had not slept for knowing  
He too, dead, was a stranger in that land  
And felt beneath the earth in the wind's flowing  
A tightening of roots and would not understand,  
Remembering lake winds in Illinois,  
That strange wind. I had felt his bones in the sand  
Listening.

— Reflects that these enjoy  
Their country's gratitude, that deep repose,  
That peace no pain can break, no hurt destroy,  
That rest, that sleep —

At Ghent the wind rose.  
There was a smell of rain and a heavy drag  
Of wind in the hedges but not as the wind blows  
Over fresh water when the waves lag  
Foaming and the willows huddle and it will rain:  
I felt him waiting.

— Indicates the flag  
Which (may he say) enisles in Flanders' plain  
This little field these happy, happy dead  
Have made America —

In the ripe grain  
The wind coiled glistening, darted, fled,  
Dragging its heavy body: at Waereghem  
The wind coiled in the grass above his head:  
Waiting — listening —

— Dedicates to them  
This earth their bones have hallowed, this last gift  
A grateful country —

Under the dry grass stem  
The words are blurred, are thickened, the words sift  
Confused by the rasp of the wind, by the thin grating  
Of ants under the grass, the minute shift  
And tumble of dusty sand separating

From dusty sand. The roots of the grass strain,  
Tighten, the earth is rigid, waits — he is waiting —

And suddenly, and all at once, the rain!

The living scatter, they run into houses, the wind  
Is trampled under the rain, shakes free, is again  
Trampled. The rain gathers, running in thinned  
Spurts of water that ravel in the dry sand  
Seeping in the sand under the grass roots, seeping  
Between cracked boards to the bones of a clenched hand:  
The earth relaxes, loosens; he is sleeping,  
He rests, he is quiet, he sleeps in a strange land.



# TOURIST DEATH

*for Sylvia Beach*



I PROMISE you these days and an understanding  
Of light in the twigs after sunfall

Do you ask to descend  
At dawn in a new world with wet on the pavements  
And a yawning cat and the fresh odor of dew  
And red geraniums under the station windows  
And doors wide and brooms and sheets on the railing  
And a whistling boy and the sun like shellac on the street

Do you ask to embark at night at the third hour  
Sliding away in the dark and the sails of the fishermen  
Slack in the light of the lanterns and black seas  
And the tide going down and the splash and drip of the hawser

Do you ask something to happen as spring does  
In a night in a small time and nothing the same again  
Life is neither a prize box nor a terminus  
Life is a haft that has fitted the palms of many  
Dark as the helved oak

with sweat bitter

Browned by numerous hands

Death is the rest of it

Death is the same bones and the trees nearer  
Death is a serious thing like the loam smell  
Of the plowed earth in the fall

Death is here

Not in another place not among strangers  
Death is under the moon here and the rain

I promise you old signs and a recognition  
Of sun in the seething grass and the wind's rising

Do you ask more

Do you ask to travel for ever

## WAY-STATION



THE incoherent rushing of the train  
Dulls like a drugged pain

Numbs  
To an ether throbbing of inaudible drums

Unfolds  
Hush within hush until the night withholds

Only its darkness.

From the deep  
Dark a voice calls like a voice in sleep

Slowly a strange name in a strange tongue.

Among

The sleeping listeners a sound  
As leaves stir faintly on the ground

When snow falls from a windless sky —  
A stir A sigh

## CHARTRES



I DO not wonder, stones,  
You have withstood so long  
The strong wind and the snows.

Were you not built to bear  
The winter and the wind  
That blows on the hill here?

But you have borne so long  
Our eyes, our mortal eyes,  
And are not worn —

## EPISTLE TO LEON-PAUL FARGUE



I DO not know what we say. I know that your poems  
Move on my mind as the hand's shade of the fisherman  
Blackens the brass shine out on the sea pool,  
As the branch blows over the dazzle of sun on the window.  
Do we call it remembering, Fargue, when the earth's dark  
Dissolves the prisms of air for us?

nigger leaning

At noon over the aft gunnel, sunglaze  
Gone where the shade falls, where the floating shadow,  
Reef far down and the wrecked hull...  
Rocks shelve into blackness

or the stars

Under the shadow of the earth like  
Minnows under an old keel

And where the elm blows over, the blind glare  
Fading upon the window glass.  
And they were there  
The pale forgotten faces  
They were always there  
We had not always seen them but they saw

I do not know what we say. Your poems are not like  
Names or an old scarf or the date on a photograph  
Or somebody speaking Erse in the crowd at the corner  
Or burned leaves — not as we say 'Remember'!

# LAND'S END

*for Adrienne Monnier*

## I GEOGRAPHY OF THIS TIME



THE peninsulas are held by an ancient people  
And races skillful in iron, makers of amulets  
Keep the sea isles

These are they who interpret the flight of birds  
Who foretell the dawn from the light in the west at sunset  
These have been long in the earth, they know the seasons  
They know by the stinging of flies when the rains come  
They smell the snow on a dry wind, they are wise  
In the changing of gales when the shape of the moon changes  
They stir in their sleep at night when the tide turns

Only they speak in the tongue of another country  
There are names in their speech of fruits unknown in these  
valleys

Also their gods are carved with the muzzles of jackals  
And their proverbs are proverbs made in a dry place  
Their festivals do not keep the days of the sea  
Their word for the sea is a word meaning the sorrow

Only their songs are of high lands beyond mountains  
Their songs are of horses grazing a wide land  
Of stars through the roofs of tents woven of horsehair  
Theirs they say were the wars fought by the heroes  
Theirs were the battles the shouting of which comes over us  
Like a sound of sleet in the dead grass in the marshes

At the time of the floods in spring they have seen on the river  
Branches bearing a round leaf and bridles  
Knotted of straw and the wooden bow of a saddle  
They have seen the bodies of birds of a white plumage  
They have smelled the reek of the pastures in stale pools  
(The sea smells in spring of the thaw water...)  
They draw their nets in spring by the brown streams



II  
EXHORTATION TO THE LIVING



that here by this unremembering  
Sea O my people  
and we have not known  
Always the sea sound nor the taste of salt  
Always  
rebuild these roofs of stone  
can we  
O winter starved  
eaters of fish guts  
blind  
With reeking sod fires in the windy room  
Can we return no more  
take ship and call  
The long rope over  
ride the landward surge  
High on the sea bar and where first the blue  
Streaks with the dribble of the brown fresh foam  
Drive up the channel with all oars  
can we  
No more return  
that on these beaches O

Sea scalded eyes

salt broken nails

rebuild

O Miserable the loose stones that were

Houses before us of forgotten men

On these last shores

can we no more

no more

Return again to our own lands

### III

### RESPONSE OF THE ANCESTORS



These men do not speak, they sit

Right and left of the coals slicing

Thongs from seal leather, cleaning their long

Knives; they listen as men to bat talk

Men to the whimper of dead old ones

Ho! they are free, they can sleep where they will

They are not afraid as we are here

For they know what the world is: they have seen

Actual shapes, things solid

Not visions, not fog shapes only, not

Glisten under the stone of fish gill  
Nor images hanging in pools among  
The sea anemones deeper than clouds are  
Down or the underneath wings of the gulls go

Sounds they have heard too, not the wave sound  
Not the no sound of the wind  
Nor tide moan under drowned ledges  
Cry of gulls, gulls crying from  
Water... No! but real things  
Riders, running of dogs, deer-fall  
Weight they have had in their hands of dead  
Birds, of the breasts softly of women  
No! and love, the weed smell of it  
Front against front not hair blown  
Dark over eyes in a dream and the mouth gone

These men do not speak; we have told them  
Tales we know of the last seas  
Tales of the great waves and the wind there  
They listen, they do not speak, they have come  
From the old lands of our people  
Hunters they are from father to son  
Herdsman, drivers of plowshares  
These are men without names; they are called  
After their lands, after their handwork  
Men will remember the smell of their garments

Not as of us the sound only  
Of words over earth door, not as the unborn  
Dead shall remember the sounds we were called by

These men do not speak: they have seen  
Shapes solid and real, live things

# REPROACH TO DEAD POETS



YOU who have spoken words in the earth

You who have broken the silence

utterers

Sayers in all lands to all peoples

Writers in candle soot on the skins

Of rams for those who come after you

voices

Echoed at night in the arched doors

And at noon in the shadow of fig trees

Hear me

Were there not

Words

Were there not words to tell with

Were there not leaf sounds in the mouths

Of women from over-sea and a call

Of birds on the lips of the children of strangers

Were there not words in all languages

In many tongues the same thing differently

The name cried out Thalassa the sea

The Sea

The sun and moon character representing

Brightness the night sound of the wind for

Always for ever and ever the verb  
Created after the speech of crickets  
Were there not words to tell with  
to tell

What lands these are

What are these

Lights through the night leaves and these voices  
Crying among us as winds rise

Or whence of what race we are that dwell with them

Were there not words to tell with

you that have told

The kings' names and the hills remembered for battles

# SIGNATURE FOR TEMPO



## I

THINK that this world against the wind of time  
Perpetually falls the way a hawk  
Falls at the wind's edge but is motionless —

Think that this silver snail the moon will climb  
All night upon time's curving stalk  
That as she climbs bends, bends beneath her —

Yes

And think that we remember the past time.

## II

These live people,  
These more  
Than three dimensional  
By time protracted edgewise into heretofore  
People,  
How shall we bury all  
These queer-shaped people,  
In graves that have no more  
Than three dimensions?  
Can we dig

With such sidlings and declensions  
As to coffin bodies big  
With memory?  
And how  
Can the earth's contracted Now  
Enclose these knuckles and this crooked knee  
Sprawled over hours of a sun long set?  
  
Or do these bones forget?

### III

Borne  
Landward on relinquishing seas,  
Worn  
By the sliding of water  
  
Whom time goes over wave by wave, do I lie  
Drowned in a crumble of surf at the sea's edge? —  
  
And wonder now what ancient bones are these  
That flake on sifting flake  
Out of deep time have shelved this shallow ledge  
Where the waves break —



## NOCTURNE



THE earth, still heavy and warm with afternoon,  
Dazed by the moon

The earth, tormented with the moon's light,  
Wandering in the night

La La The moon is a lovely thing to see —  
The moon is an agony

Full moon, moon rise, the old, old pain  
Of brightness in dilated eyes

The ache of still  
Elbows leaning on the narrow sill

Of motionless cold hands upon the wet  
Marble of the parapet

Of open eyelids of a child behind  
The crooked glimmer of the window blind

Of sliding faint remindful squares  
Across the lamplight on the rocking-chairs

Why do we stand so late  
Stiff fingers on the moonlit gate?

Why do we stand  
To watch so long the fall of moonlight on the sand?

What is it we cannot recall?

Tormented by the moon's light  
The earth turns wandering through the night.

# MEN

*(On a phrase of Apollinaire)*



OUR history is grave noble and tragic  
We trusted the look of the sun on the green leaves  
We built our towns of stone with enduring ornaments  
We worked the hard flint for basins of water

We believed in the feel of the earth under us  
We planted corn grapes apple-trees rhubarb  
Nevertheless we knew others had died  
Everything we have done has been faithful and dangerous

We believed in the promises made by the brows of women  
We begot children at night in the warm wool  
We comforted those who wept in fear on our shoulders  
Those who comforted us had themselves vanished

We fought at the dikes in the bright sun for the pride of it  
We beat drums and marched with music and laughter  
We were drunk and lay with our fine dreams in the straw  
We saw the stars through the hair of lewd women

Our history is grave noble and tragic  
Many of us have died and are not remembered  
Many cities are gone and their channels broken  
We have lived a long time in this land and with honor

## SELENE AFTERWARDS



**THE** moon is dead, you lovers!

## She who walked

Naked upon the dark Ægean, she  
Who under Ida in the beech groves mocked  
The rutting satyrs, she who secretly,  
Leaving below her the slow lifting sea,  
Climbed through the woods of Latmos to the bed  
Of the eternal sleeper — she is dead,

Dead, you lovers! I have seen her face.  
The sun rose by St.-Étienne. She fled  
Half turning back (as though the plunge of space  
Over the world's rim frightened her) her head  
And stared and stared at me. Her face was dead.  
It was a woman's face but dead as stone  
And leper white and withered to the bone.

It was a woman's skull the shriveling cold  
Out there among the stars had withered dry  
And its dry white was mottled with dry mould.  
It was a long dead skull the caustic lye  
Of time had eaten clean, and in the sky

As under the cold water of a lake  
Lay crumbling year by year, white flake by flake,

Scabious, scurfy. Oh, look down, look down  
You lovers, through that water where there swing  
Night shadows of the world. Look deep, deep.

Drown

Your eyes in deepness. Look! There lies the thing  
That made you love, that maddened you!

Oh sing,

Sing in the fields, you lovers. The low moon  
Moves in the elms. It will be summer soon....

# EPISTLE TO BE LEFT IN THE EARTH



... IT IS colder now

there are many stars

we are drifting

North by the Great Bear

the leaves are falling

The water is stone in the scooped rocks

to southward

Red sun grey air

the crows are

Slow on their crooked wings

the jays have left us

Long since we passed the flares of Orion

Each man believes in his heart he will die

Many have written last thoughts and last letters

None know if our deaths are now or forever

None know if this wandering earth will be found

We lie down and the snow covers our garments

I pray you

you (if any open this writing)

Make in your mouths the words that were our names

I will tell you all we have learned

I will tell you everything

The earth is round

there are springs under the orchards

The loam cuts with a blunt knife

beware of

Elms in thunder

the lights in the sky are stars

We think they do not see

we think also

The trees do not know nor the leaves of the grasses

hear us

The birds too are ignorant

Do not listen

Do not stand at dark in the open windows

We before you have heard this

they are voices

They are not words at all but the wind rising

Also none among us has seen God

(... We have thought often

The flaws of sun in the late and driving weather

Pointed to one tree but it was not so)

As for the nights I warn you the nights are dangerous

The wind changes at night and the dreams come

It is very cold

there are strange stars near Arcturus

Voices are crying an unknown name in the sky



# AMERICAN LETTER

*for Gerald Murphy*



THE wind is east but the hot weather continues,  
Blue and no clouds, the sound of the leaves thin,  
Dry like the rustling of paper, scored across  
With the slate-shrill screech of the locusts.

The tossing of

Pines is the low sound. In the wind's running  
The wild carrots smell of the burning sun.  
Why should I think of the dolphins at Capo di Mele?  
Why should I see in my mind the taut sail  
And the hill over St.-Tropez and your hand on the tiller?  
Why should my heart be troubled with palms still?  
I am neither a sold boy nor a Chinese official  
Sent to sicken in Pa for some Lo-Yang dish.  
This is my own land, my sky, my mountain:  
This — not the humming pines and the surf and the sound  
At the Ferme Blanche, nor Port Cros in the dusk and the harbor  
Floating the motionless ship and the sea-drowned star.  
I am neither Po Chü-i nor another after  
Far from home, in a strange land, daft  
For the talk of his own sort and the taste of his lettuces.  
This land is my native land. And yet  
I am sick for home for the red roofs and the olives,

And the foreign words and the smell of the sea fall.  
How can a wise man have two countries?  
How can a man have the earth and the wind and want  
A land far off, alien, smelling of palm-trees  
And the yellow gorse at noon in the long calms?

It is a strange thing — to be an American.  
Neither an old house it is with the air  
Tasting of hung herbs and the sun returning  
Year after year to the same door and the churn  
Making the same sound in the cool of the kitchen  
Mother to son's wife, and the place to sit  
Marked in the dusk by the worn stone at the wellhead —  
That — nor the eyes like each other's eyes and the skull  
Shaped to the same fault and the hands' sameness.  
Neither a place it is nor a blood name.  
America is West and the wind blowing.  
America is a great word and the snow,  
A way, a white bird, the rain falling,  
A shining thing in the mind and the gulls' call.  
America is neither a land nor a people,  
A word's shape it is, a wind's sweep —  
America is alone: many together,  
Many of one mouth, of one breath,  
Dressed as one — and none brothers among them:  
Only the taught speech and the aped tongue.  
America is alone and the gulls calling.

It is a strange thing to be an American.  
It is strange to live on the high world in the stare  
Of the naked sun and the stars as our bones live.  
Men in the old lands housed by their rivers.  
They built their towns in the vales in the earth's shelter.  
We first inhabit the world. We dwell  
On the half earth, on the open curve of a continent.  
Sea is divided from sea by the day-fall. The dawn  
Rides the low east with us many hours;  
First are the capes, then are the shorelands, now  
The blue Appalachians faint at the day rise;  
The willows shudder with light on the long Ohio:  
The Lakes scatter the low sun: the prairies  
Slide out of dark: in the eddy of clean air  
The smoke goes up from the high plains of Wyoming:  
The steep Sierras arise: the struck foam  
Flames at the wind's heel on the far Pacific.  
Already the noon leans to the eastern cliff:  
The elms darken the door and the dust-heavy lilacs.

It is strange to sleep in the bare stars and to die  
On an open land where few bury before us:  
(From the new earth the dead return no more.)  
It is strange to be born of no race and no people.  
In the old lands they are many together They keep  
The wise past and the words spoken in common.  
They remember the dead with their hands, their mouths dumb.  
They answer each other with two words in their meeting.

They live together in small things. They eat  
The same dish, their drink is the same and their proverbs.  
Their youth is like. They are like in their ways of love.  
They are many men. There are always others beside them.  
Here it is one man and another and wide  
On the darkening hills the faint smoke of the houses.  
Here it is one man and the wind in the boughs.

Therefore our hearts are sick for the south water.  
The smell of the gorse comes back to our night thought.  
We are sick at heart for the red roofs and the olives;  
We are sick at heart for the voice and the foot fall...

Therefore we will not go though the sea call us.

This, this is our land, this is our people,  
This that is neither a land nor a race. We must reap  
The wind here in the grass for our soul's harvest:  
Here we must eat our salt or our bones starve.  
Here we must live or live only as shadows.  
This is our race, we that have none, that have had  
Neither the old walls nor the voices around us,  
This is our land, this is our ancient ground —  
The raw earth, the mixed bloods and the strangers,  
The different eyes, the wind, and the heart's change.  
These we will not leave though the old call us.  
This is our country-earth, our blood, our kind.  
Here we will live our years till the earth blind us —

The wind blows from the east. The leaves fall.  
Far off in the pines a jay rises.  
The wind smells of haze and the wild ripe apples.  
  
I think of the masts at Cette and the sweet rain.

# INVOCATION TO THE SOCIAL MUSE



SEÑORA it is true the Greeks are dead:

It is true also that we here are Americans:

That we use the machines: that a sight of the god is unusual:

That more people have more thoughts: that there are

Progress and science and tractors and revolutions and

Marx and the wars more antiseptic and murderous

And music in every home: there is also Hoover:

Does the lady suggest we should write it out in The Word?

Does Madame recall our responsibilities? We are

Whores Fräulein: poets Fräulein are persons of

Known vocation following troops: they must sleep with

Stragglers from either prince and of both views:

The rules permit them to further the business of neither:

It is also strictly forbidden to mix in maneuvers:

Those that infringe are inflated with praise on the plazas —

Their bones are resultantly afterwards found under newspapers:

Preferring life with the sons to death with the fathers  
We also doubt on the record whether the sons  
Will still be shouting around with the same huzzas —

For we hope Lady to live to lie with the youngest:  
There are only a handful of things a man likes  
Generation to generation hungry or

Well fed: the earth's one: life's  
One: Mister Morgan is not one:

There is nothing worse for our trade than to be in style:

He that goes naked goes farther at last than another:  
Wrap the bard in a flag or a school and they'll jimmy his  
Door down and be thick in his bed — for a month:

(Who recalls the address now of the Imagists?)  
But the naked man has always his own nakedness:  
People remember forever his live limbs:

They may drive him out of the camps but one will take him:  
They may stop his tongue on his teeth with a rope's argument —  
He will lie in a house and be warm when they are shaking:

Besides Tovarishch how to embrace an army?  
How to take to one's chamber a million souls?  
How to conceive in the name of a column of marchers?

The things of the poet are done to a man alone  
As the things of love are done — or of death when he hears the  
Step withdraw on the stair and the clock tick only:

Neither his class nor his kind nor his trade may come near him  
There where he lies on his left arm and will die:  
Nor his class nor his kind nor his trade when the blood is jeering

And his knee's in the soft of the bed where his love lies:

I remind you Barinya the life of the poet is hard —  
A hardy life with a boot as quick as a fiver:

Is it just to demand of us also to bear arms?



# LINES FOR AN INTERMENT



NOW it is fifteen years you have lain in the meadow:  
The boards at your face have gone through: the earth is  
Packed down and the sound of the rain is fainter:  
The roots of the first grass are dead:

It's a long time to lie in the earth with your honor:  
The world Soldier the world has been moving on:

The girls wouldn't look at you twice in the cloth cap:  
Six years old they were when it happened:

It bores them even in books: 'Soissons besieged!'  
As for the gents they have joined the American Legion:

Belts and a brass band and the ladies' auxiliaries:  
The Californians march in the OD silk:

We are all acting again like civilized beings:  
People mention it at tea...

The Facts of Life we have learned are Economic:  
You were deceived by the detonations of bombs:

You thought of courage and death when you thought of warfare:  
Hadn't they taught you the fine words were unfortunate?

Now that we understand we judge without bias:  
We feel of course for those who had to die:

Women have written us novels of great passion  
Proving the useless death of the dead was a tragedy:

Nevertheless it is foolish to chew gall:  
The foremost writers on both sides have apologized:

The Germans are back in the Midi with cropped hair:  
The English are drinking the better beer in Bavaria:

You can rest now in the rain in the Belgian meadow —  
Now that it's all explained away and forgotten:  
Now that the earth is hard and the wood rots:

Now you are dead...

FRESCOES  
FOR MR. ROCKEFELLER'S CITY...



1  
LANDSCAPE AS A NUDE



SHE lies on her left side her flank golden:  
Her hair is burned black with the strong sun:  
The scent of her hair is of rain in the dust on her shoulders:  
She has brown breasts and the mouth of no other country:

Ah she is beautiful here in the sun where she lies:  
She is not like the soft girls naked in vineyards  
Nor the soft naked girls of the English islands  
Where the rain comes in with the surf on an east wind:

Hers is the west wind and the sunlight: the west  
Wind is the long clean wind of the continents —  
The wind turning with earth: the wind descending  
Steadily out of the evening and following on:

The wind here where she lies is west: the trees  
Oak ironwood cottonwood hickory: standing in  
Great groves they roll on the wind as the sea would:  
The grasses of Iowa Illinois Indiana

Run with the plunge of the wind as a wave tumbling:

Under her knees there is no green lawn of the Florentines:  
Under her dusty knees is the corn stubble:  
Her belly is flecked with the flickering light of the corn:

She lies on her left side her flank golden:  
Her hair is burned black with the strong sun:  
The scent of her hair is of dust and of smoke on her shoulders:  
She has brown breasts and the mouth of no other country:

## 2

### WILD WEST



THERE were none of my blood in this battle:  
There were Minneconjous: Sans Arcs: Brules:  
Many nations of Sioux: they were few men galloping:

This would have been in the long days in June:  
They were galloping well deployed under the plum-trees:  
They were driving riderless horses: themselves they were few:

Crazy Horse had done it with few numbers:  
Crazy Horse was small for a Lakota:  
He was riding always alone thinking of something:

He was standing alone by the picket lines by the ropes:  
He was young then: he was thirty when he died:  
Unless there were children to talk he took no notice:

When the soldiers came for him there on the other side  
On the Greasy Grass in the villages we were shouting  
'Hoka Hey! Crazy Horse will be riding!'

They fought in the water: horses and men were drowning:  
They rode on the butte: dust settled in sunlight:  
Hoka Hey! they lay on the bloody ground:

No one could tell of the dead which man was Custer...  
That was the end of his luck: by that river:  
The soldiers beat him at Slim Buttes once:

They beat him at Willow Creek when the snow lifted:  
The last time they beat him was the Tongue:  
He had only the meat he had made and of that little:

Do you ask why he should fight? It was his country:  
My God should he not fight? It was his:  
But after the Tongue there were no herds to be hunting:

He cut the knots of the tails and he led them in:  
He cried out 'I am Crazy Horse! Do not touch me!'  
There were many soldiers between and the gun glinting...

And a Mister Josiah Perham of Maine had much of the  
land Mister Perham was building the Northern Pacific  
railroad that is Mister Perham was saying at lunch that

forty say fifty millions of acres in gift and  
government grant outright ought to be worth a  
wide price on the Board at two-fifty and

later a Mister Cooke had relieved Mister Perham and  
later a Mister Morgan relieved Mister Cooke:  
Mister Morgan converted at prices current:

It was all prices to them: they never looked at it:  
why should they look at the land: they were Empire Builders:  
it was all in the bid and the asked and the ink on their books...

When Crazy Horse was there by the Black Hills  
His heart would be big with the love he had for that country  
And all the game he had seen and the mares he had ridden

And how it went out from you wide and clean in the sunlight

*Footnote:* Black Elk's memories of Crazy Horse recorded by Neihardt.

### 3

## BURYING GROUND BY THE TIES



AYEE! Ai! This is heavy earth on our shoulders:  
There were none of us born to be buried in this earth:  
Niggers we were Portuguese Magyars Polacks:

We were born to another look of the sky certainly:  
Now we lie here in the river pastures:  
We lie in the mowings under the thick turf:

We hear the earth and the all-day rasp of the grasshoppers:  
It was we laid the steel on this land from ocean to ocean:  
It was we (if you know) put the U. P. through the passes

Bringing her down into Laramie full load  
Eighteen mile on the granite anticlinal  
Forty-three foot to the mile and the grade holding:

It was we did it: hunkies of our kind:  
It was we dug the caved-in holes for the cold water:  
It was we built the gully spurs and the freight sidings:

Who would do it but we and the Irishmen bossing us?  
It was all foreign-born men there were in this country:  
It was Scotsmen Englishmen Chinese Squareheads Austrians...

Ayee! but there's weight to the earth under it:  
Not for this did we come out — to be lying here  
Nameless under the ties in the clay cuts:

There's nothing good in the world but the rich will buy it:  
Everything sticks to the grease of a gold note —  
Even a continent — even a new sky!

Do not pity us much for the strange grass over us:  
We laid the steel to the stone stock of these mountains:  
The place of our graves is marked by the telegraph poles!

It was not to lie in the bottoms we came out  
And the trains going over us here in the dry hollows...



# OIL PAINTING OF THE ARTIST AS THE ARTIST



THE plump Mr. Pl'f is washing his hands of America:  
The plump Mr. Pl'f is in ochre with such hair:

America is in blue-black-grey-green-sandcolor:  
America is a continent — many lands:

The plump Mr. Pl'f is washing his hands of America:  
He is pictured at Pau on the *place* and his eyes glaring:

He thinks of himself as an exile from all this:  
As an émigré from his own time into history —

(History being an empty house without owners  
A practical man may get in by the privy stones —

The dead are excellent hosts: they have no objections —  
And once in he can nail the knob on the next one

Living the life of a classic in bad air with  
Himself for the Past and his face in the glass for Posterity)

The Cinquecento is nothing at all like Nome  
Or Natchez or Wounded Knee or the Shenandoah:

Your vulgarity Tennessee: your violence Texas:  
The rocks under your fields Ohio Connecticut:

Your clay Missouri your clay: you have driven him out:  
You have shadowed his life Appalachians purple mountains:

There is much too much of your flowing Mississippi:  
He prefers a tidier stream with a terrace for trippers and

Cypresses mentioned in Horace or Henry James:  
He prefers a country where everything carries the name of a

Countess or real king or an actual palace or  
Something in Prose and the stock prices all in Italian:

There is more shade for an artist under a fig  
Than under the whole damn range (he finds) of the Big Horns

## EMPIRE BUILDERS



*The Museum Attendant:*

This is *The Making of America in Five Panels*:

This is Mister Harriman making America:

Mister-Harriman-is-buying-the-Union-Pacific-at-Seventy:

The Sante Fe is shining on his hair:

This is Commodore Vanderbilt making America:

Mister-Vanderbilt-is-eliminating-the-short-interest-in-

Hudson:

Observe the carving on the rocking chair:

This is J. P. Morgan making America:

(The Tennessee Coal is behind to the left of the Steel Company:)

Those in mauve are braces he is wearing:

This is Mister Mellon making America:

Mister-Mellon-is-represented-as-a-symbolical-figure-in-

aluminum-

Strewing-bank-stocks-on-a-burnished-stair:

This is the Bruce is the Barton making America:  
Mister-Barton-is-selling-us-Doctor's-Deliciousest-Dentifrice:  
This is he in beige with the canary:

You have just beheld the Makers making America:  
This is *The Making of America in Five Panels*:  
America lies to the west-southwest of the Switch-Tower:  
There is nothing to see of America but land:

*The Original Document*

*under the Panel Paint:*

'To Thos. Jefferson Esq. his obd't serv't

M. Lewis: captain: detached:

Sir:

Having in mind your repeated commands in this matter:  
And the worst half of it done and the streams mapped:

And we here on the back of this beach beholding the  
Other ocean — two years gone and the cold

Breaking with rain for the third spring since St. Louis:  
The crows at the fishbones on the frozen dunes:

The first cranes going over from south north:  
And the river down by a mark of the pole since the morning:

And time near to return, and a ship (Spanish)  
Lying in for the salmon: and fearing chance or the

Drought or the Sioux should deprive you of these discoveries —

Therefore we send by sea in this writing:

Above the  
Platte there were long plains and a clay country:  
Rim of the sky far off: grass under it:

Dung for the cook fires by the sulphur licks:  
After that there were low hills and the sycamores:

And we poled up by the Great Bend in the skiffs:  
The honey bees left us after the Osage River:

The wind was west in the evenings and no dew and the  
Morning Star larger and whiter than usual —

The winter rattling in the brittle haws:  
The second year there was sage and the quail calling:

All that valley is good land by the river:  
Three thousand miles and the clay cliffs and

Rue and beargrass by the water banks  
And many birds and the brant going over and tracks of

Bear elk wolves marten: the buffalo  
Numberless so that the cloud of their dust covers them:

The antelope fording the fall creeks: and the mountains and  
Grazing lands and the meadow lands and the ground

Sweet and open and well-drained:

We advise you to

Settle troops at the forks and to issue licenses:

Many men will have living on these lands:  
There is wealth in the earth for them all and the wood standing

And wild birds on the water where they sleep:  
There is stone in the hills for the towns of a great people...'

You have just beheld the Makers making America:

They screwed her scrawny and gaunt with their seven-year  
panics:

They bought her back on their mortgages old-whore-cheap:  
They fattened their bonds at her breasts till the thin blood  
ran from them:

Men have forgotten how full clear and deep  
The Yellowstone moved on the gravel and grass grew  
When the land lay waiting for her westward people!

# BACKGROUND WITH REVOLUTIONARIES



And the corn singing Millennium!  
Lenin! Millennium! Lennium!

*When they're shunting the cars on the Katy a mile off  
When they're shunting the cars when they're shunting the cars on  
the Katy  
You can hear the clank of the couplings riding away*

Also Comrade Devine who writes of America  
Most instructively having in 'Seventy-four  
Crossed to the Hoboken side on the Barclay Street Ferry

*She sits on a settle in the State of North Dakota  
O she sits on a settle in the State of North Dakota  
She can hear the engines whistle over Iowa and Idaho*

Also Comrade Edward Remington Ridge  
Who has prayed God since the April of 'Seventeen  
To replace in his life his lost (M.E.) religion

*And The New York Daily Worker goes a'blowing over Arkansas*  
*The New York Daily Worker goes a'blowing over Arkansas*  
*The grasses let it go along the Ozarks over Arkansas*

Even Comrade Grenadine Grilt who has tried since  
August tenth for something to feel about strongly in  
Verses — his personal passions having tired

*I can tell my land by the jays in the apple-trees*  
*Tell my land by the jays in the apple-trees*  
*I can tell my people by the blue-jays in the apple-trees*

Aindt you read in d' books you are all brudders?  
D' glassic historic objective broves you are brudders!  
You and d' Wops and d' Chinks you are all brudders!  
Havend't you got it d' same ideology? Havend't you?

*When it's yesterday in Oregon it's one A M in Maine*  
*And she slides; and the day slides; and it runs; runs over us:*  
*And the bells strike twelve strike twelve strike twelve*  
*In Marblehead in Buffalo in Cheyenne in Cherokee*  
*Yesterday runs on the states like a crow's shadow*

For Marx has said to us Workers what do you need?  
And Stalin has said to us Starvers what do you need?  
You need the Dialectical Materialism!



*She's a tough land under the corn mister:  
She has changed the bone in the cheeks of many races:  
She has winced the eyes of the soft Slavs with her sun on them:  
She has tried the fat from the round rumps of Italians:  
Even the voice of the English has gone dry  
And hard on the tongue and alive in the throat speaking:*

*She's a tough land under the oak-trees mister:  
It may be she can change the word in the book  
As she changes the bone of a man's head in his children:  
It may be that the earth and the men remain...*

*There is too much sun on the lids of my eyes to be listening*



*'The first I knew was the spirit of my fellow, Elpenor, whose body was not yet interred under the ample ground. We had left him unwept and unburied in the halls of Circe, for that these other labors came upon us urgently. When I saw him I had compassion and sharply cried across to him: "Elpenor, how come you here into the gloomy shades? Your feet have been quicker than my ship." He... answered me:'* — From Book XI of the *Odyssey*: Lawrence's translation.

IT IS I, Odysseus — Elpenor:  
Oarsman: death is between us:

Three days I have waited you  
Coming my own way  
Not your way

(The oar-handle hard to the nipple)  
Not being come in the ship:

Neither by dry earth  
There being no dry earth

But roundabout: by an art:  
By the deft-in-air-darting

Way of an art severing  
Earth or air or whatever:

And the place I believe to be Hell from the  
Many dead and the pelts of

Great captains: emperors:  
Princes: leaders of men:

Their rumps turned round to the wind:  
And the rich with their eyes hidden:

And the redblooded twofisted gogetting  
He-ghosts froghonking wretchedly:

And from cairns and from creeks and from rock piles  
And out of the holes of foxes

Fools booming like oracles:  
Philosophers promising more

And worse to come of it yet  
And proving it out of the textbooks:

Also the young men  
Their rears strung out on the fences

Watching for shifts in the breeze:  
And beyond under the lee are the

Actual dead: the millions  
Only a god could have killed —

Millions starving for corn with  
Mountains of waste corn and

Millions cold for a house with  
Cities of empty houses and

Millions naked for cloth and the  
Looms choked with the cloth-weave:

The place I believe to be Hell from the  
Cold and the cries and the welter of

Kings dukes dictators  
Heroes headmen of cities

Ranting orations from balconies  
Boasting to lead us back to the

Other days: to the odor of  
Cooked leeks in the cold and our

Wives and the well-known landmarks —  
To the normal life of a man as in

Old days and in sun:  
The noon's work done

And the butterflies in their pairs  
Under the beams of the areas:



Is it to these shores  
Odysseus contriver of horses  
You of all men born

Come — and alive — demanding  
The way back to your land —  
The way back to the sands and the

Boat-grooved beaches of years  
Before the war and the spear-handling?

Wishful still to return  
Do you ask way by the earth or by

Dark sea to a country  
Known under other suns?

Roads on the sea fade:  
And only the old ladies

Remembering red coats  
Hope to return to the lotuses:

Let tit-formed Tiresias tell you  
Tasting the bloody helm  
The way back by the fells and the

Hate and the wars and the envy of  
Men aroused against men —  
With a Heaven-on-earth at the end of it!

For myself — if you ask me —  
There's no way back over sea water

Nor by earth's oaks nor beyond them:  
There is only the way on:

You had best — if you ask me —  
Push on from this place to the seaward

Laying your course close in  
Where Tiresias' sirens sing of the

Dialectical hope  
And the kind of childish utopia

Found in a small boys' school —  
Destiny written in Rules:

Life as the Teacher left it:  
Work as the answer to everything —

Driving her on through  
Till you hear the words of that music:

Till you see well how the white and  
Grey of those rocks is the white and

Grey not of dead men's ribs  
But the stain of the seagulls' dribblings:

You had best — trusting neither to  
Charts nor to prophets but seamanship —

You had best — if you ask me —  
Sail on by the sun to the seaward

Till you come to a clean place  
With the smell of the pine in your faces and

Broom and a bitter turf  
And the larks blown over the surf and the

Rocks red to the wave-height:  
No sound but the wave's:

No call of a cock from the  
Windward shore nor of oxen —

Gull's shadow for hawk's:  
Gull's cry for the hawk's cry —

On by the open sea  
To a land with a clean beach

An unplowed country  
Pure under cleansing sun

With the dung burned dry on the gravel  
And only the sand to have

And begin it again: start over  
Forgetting the raised loaves and the

Fat cows and the larders of  
Sweating stone — the arms of a

Naked girl under lamb-skins:  
Begin it again with the hammer of

Hard rain on your heads and the  
Raw fern for your bedding and

Thirst and the thorn to grow —  
Bringing yourselves to a home  
By your own arms and the boat in



Spite of gods and the prophecy:  
Who here of the soft and the

Boneless dead will hinder you?  
Rich men? wise ones? kings?

Dictators? adolescents  
Screaming from well-lined nests?

Or Tiresias: he that in Hell  
Drunken with blood: foretelling the

Future day by the past:  
Serving time for a master:

Teaches your living selves  
That the dooms of the Fates are inevitable?

You have only to push on  
To whatever it is that's beyond us

Showing the flat of your sword and they'll  
Lick sand from before you!

You have only to cross this place  
And launch ship and get way on her

Working her out with the oars to the  
Full wind and go forward and

Bring yourselves to a home:  
To a new land: to an ocean

Never sailed: not to Ithaca:  
Not to your beds — but the withering

Seaweed under the thorn and the  
Gulls and another morning...



As long as you bury me there on the beach  
With my own oar stuck in the sand  
So that ships standing along in  
May see the stick of it straighter (though grey) than the  
Olives: and ease all: and say —  
'There is some man dead there that once pulled  
'Water as we do with these and the thing is his  
'Oarsweep': as long as you bury me there  
What will it matter to me if my name  
Lacks and the fat-leaved beach-plants cover my  
Mound and the wood of the oar goes silver as  
Drift sea wood goes silver —

# CONQUISTADOR



## DEDICATION

‘O frati,’ dissi, ‘che per cento milia  
Perigli siete giunti all’ occidente’

THE DIVINE COMEDY

INFERNO, *canto XXVI, lines 112, 113*



## NOTE

WHERE I have followed the historical chronicles of the Conquest of Mexico I have, in general, followed the account given by Bernál Díaz del Castillo, one of the Conquerors, in his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*. I have however altered and transposed and invented incidents at my own pleasure. I am indebted to the excellent notes of Mr. Alfred Percival Maudsley in his (Hakluyt Society) edition of the *True History*. My account of the topography of the march from the sea-coast to the Valley of Mexico is based upon my own experience of the route and the country by foot and mule-back in the winter of 1929 and differs from that of the historians. Indian names have been given their Spanish pronunciation for obvious reasons. (Professor John Hubert Cornyn's *Song of Quetzalcoatl* has a note on Aztec

pronunciation for those who are interested.) Proper names have been accented for the reader's convenience even when no accent would be required in Spanish. I hope that the strength of my attachment to the country of Mexico may, to some degree, atone for my presumption, as an American, in writing of it.

The poem was written in 1928, 1929, and 1931 in Paris, Jalapa, and Conway, Massachusetts.

*Bernal Díaz' Preface to his Book* was published, in an earlier form, in the *Yale Review*, winter of 1929-1930, under the title *Conquistador.*'

## P R O L O G U E



AND the way goes on in the worn earth:

and we (others) —

What are the dead to us in our better fortune?

They have left us the roads made and the walls standing:

They have left us the chairs in the rooms:

what is there more of them —

Either their words in the stone or their graves in the land

Or the rusted tang in the turf-root where they fought —

Has truth against us?

(And another man

Where the wild geese rise from Michigan the water

Veering the clay bluff: in another wind....)

Surely the will of God in the earth alters:

Time done is dark as are sleep's thickets:  
Dark is the past: none waking walk there:  
Neither may live men of those waters drink:

And their speech they have left upon the coins to mock us:  
And the weight of their skulls at our touch is a shuck's weight:  
And their rains are dry and the sound of their leaves fallen:

(We that have still the sun and the green places)  
And they care nothing for living men: and the honey of  
Sun is slight in their teeth as a seed's taste —

What are the dead to us in the world's wonder?  
Why (and again now) on their shadowy beaches  
Pouring before them the slow painful blood

Do we return to force the truthful speech of them  
Shrieking like snipe along their gusty sand  
And stand: and as the dark ditch fills beseech them

(Reaching across the surf their fragile hands) to  
Speak to us?

as by that other ocean  
The elder shadows to the sea-borne man

Guarding the ram's flesh and the bloody dole....

Speak to me Conquerors!

But not as they!

Bring not those others with you whose new-closed

(O Brothers! Bones now in the witless rain!)

And weeping eyes remember living men:

(Not Anticlea! Not Elpenor's face!)

Bring not among you hither the new dead —

Lest they should wake and the unwilling lids

Open and know me — and the not-known end!

And Sándoval comes first and the Pálos wind

Stirs in the young hair: and the smoky candle

Shudders the sick face and the fevered skin:

And still the dead feet come: and Alvarádo

Clear in that shadow as a faggot kindled:

The brave one: stupid: and the face he had

Shining with good looks: his skin pink:

His legs warped at the knee like the excellent horseman:

And gentleman's ways and the tail of the sword swinging:

And Olíd the good fighter: his face coarse:

His teeth clean as a dog's: the lip wrinkled:

Oléa — so do the winds follow fortune —

Oléa with the blade drawn and the clinging  
Weeds about him and the broken hands:  
And still they come: and from the shadow fixes

Eyes against me a mute armored man  
Staring as wakened sleeper into embers:  
This is Cortés that took the famous land:

The eye-holes narrow to the long night's ebbing:  
The grey skin crawls beneath the scanty beard:  
Neither the eyes nor the sad mouth remember:

Other and nameless are there shadows here  
Cold in the little light as winter crickets:  
Torpid with old death: under sullen years

Numb as pale spiders in the blind leaves hidden:  
These to the crying voices do not stir:  
So still are trees the climbing stars relinquish:

And last and through the weak dead comes — the uncertain  
Fingers before him on the sightless air —  
An old man speaking: and the wind-blown words

Blur and the mouth moves and before the staring  
Eyes go shadows of that ancient time:  
So does a man speak from the dream that bears his



Sleeping body with it and the cry  
Comes from a great way off as over water —  
As the sea-bell's that the veering wind divides:

(And the sound runs on the valleys of the water:)

And the light returns as in past time  
as in evenings  
Distant with yellow summer on the straw —

As the light in America comes: without leaves...

# BERNÁL DÍAZ' PREFACE TO HIS BOOK



'THAT which I have myself seen and the fighting'....

And I am an ignorant man: and this priest this  
Gómara with the school-taught skip to his writing

The pompous Latin the appropriate feasts  
The big names the imperial decorations  
The beautiful battles and the brave deceased

The onward marches the wild Indian nations  
The conquests sieges sorties wars campaigns  
(And one eye always on the live relations) —

He with his famous history of New Spain —  
This priest is a learned man: is not ignorant:  
And I am poor: without gold: gainless:

My lands deserts in Guatemala: my fig-tree the  
Spiked bush: my grapes thorns: my children  
Half-grown: sons with beards: the big one

Breaking the small of his back in the brothel thills  
And a girl to be married and all of them snarling at home  
With the Indian look in their eyes like a cat killing:

And this Professor Francisco López de Gómara  
Childless; not poor: and I am old: over eighty:  
Stupid with sleepless nights: unused to the combing of

Words clean of the wool while the tale waits:  
And he is a youthful man: a sound one: lightened with  
Good sleep: skilled in the pen's plaiting —

I am an ignorant old sick man: blind with the  
Shadow of death on my face and my hands to lead me:  
And he not ignorant: not sick —

but I

Fought in those battles! These were my own deeds!  
These names he writes of mouthing them out as a man would  
Names in Herodotus — dead and their wars to read —

These were my friends: these dead my companions:  
I: Bernál Díaz: called del Castillo:  
Called in the time of my first fights El Galán:

I here in the turn of the day in the feel of  
Darkness to come now: moving my chair with the change:  
Thinking too much these times how the doves would wheel at

Evening over my youth and the air's strangeness:  
Thinking too much of my old town of Medina  
And the Spanish dust and the smell of the true rain:

I: poor: blind in the sun: I have seen  
With these eyes those battles: I saw Montezúma:  
I saw the armies of Mexico marching the leaning

Wind in their garments: the painted faces: the plumes  
Blown on the light air: I saw that city:  
I walked at night on those stones: in the shadowy rooms

I have heard the chink of my heel and the bats twittering:  
I: poor as I am: I was young in that country:  
These words were my life: these letters written

Cold on the page with the split ink and the shunt of the  
Stubborn thumb: these marks at my fingers:  
These are the shape of my own life....

and I hunted the

Unknown birds in the west with their beautiful wings!

Old men should die with their time's span:  
The sad thing is not death: the sad thing

Is the life's loss out of earth when the living vanish:  
All that was good in the throat: the hard going:  
The marching singing in sunshine: the showery land:

The quick loves: the sleep: the waking: the blowing of  
Winds over us: all this that we knew:  
All this goes out at the end as the flowing of

Water carries the leaves down: and the few —  
Three or four there are of us still that remember it —  
Perish: and that time's stopt like a stale tune:

And the bright young masters with their bitter treble  
Understanding it all like an old game!  
And the pucker of art on their lips like the pip of a lemon! —

‘The tedious veteran jealous of his fame!’  
What is my fame or the fame of these my companions?  
Their tombs are the bellies of Indians: theirs are the shameful

Graves in the wild earth: in the Godless sand:  
None know the place of their bones: as for mine  
Strangers will dig my grave in a stony land:

Even my sons have the strangeness of dark kind in them:  
Indian dogs will bark at dusk by my sepulchre:  
What is my fame! But those days: the shine of the

Sun in that time: the wind then: the step  
Of the moon over those leaf-fallen nights: the sleet in the  
Dry grass: the smell of the dust where we slept —

These things were real: these suns had heat in them:  
This was brine in the mouth: bitterest foam:  
Earth: water to drink: bread to be eaten —

Not the sound of a word like the writing of Gómara:  
Not a past time: a year: the name of a  
Battle lost — ‘and the Emperor Charles came home

‘That year: and that was the year the same  
‘They fought in Flanders and the Duke was hung —’  
The dates of empire: the dry skull of fame!

No but our lives: the days of our lives: we were young then:  
The strong sun was standing in deep trees:  
We drank at the springs: the thongs of our swords unslung to it:

We saw that city on the inland sea:  
Towers between: and the green-crowned Montezúma  
Walking the gardens of shade: and the staggering bees:

And the girls bearing the woven baskets of bloom on their  
Black hair: their breasts alive: and the hunters  
Shouldering dangling herons with their ruffled plumes:

We were the first that found that famous country:  
We marched by a king's name: we crossed the sierras:  
Unknown hardships we suffered: hunger:

Death by the stone knife: thirst: we fared by the  
Bitter streams: we came at last to that water:  
Towers were steep upon the fluttering air:

We were the lords of it all....

Now time has taught us:

Death has mastered us most: sorrow and pain  
Sickness and evil days are our lives' lot:

Now even the time of our youth has been taken:  
Now are our deeds words: our lives chronicles:  
Afterwards none will think of the night rain....

How shall a man endure the will of God and the  
Days and the silence!

In the world before us

Neither in Cuba nor the isles beyond —

Not Fonséca himself the sagging whore —  
Not the Council the Audience even the Indians —  
Knew of a land to the west: they skirted the Floridas:

They ran the islands on the bare-pole winds:  
They touched the Old Main and the midland shores:  
They saw the sun go down at the gulf's beginning:

None had sailed to the west and returned till Córdoba:  
I went in that ship: Alvarez handled her:  
Trusting to luck: keeping the evening before him:

Sighting after the third week land  
And no report of a land there in that ocean:  
The Indians clean: wearing the delicate bands:

Cape Catoche we called it: 'conës catoche' —  
So they cried to us over the sea flood:  
Many idols they had for their devotion

Some of women: some coupled in sodomy  
So we sailed on: we came to Campéché:  
There by the sweet pool they kindled the wood-fire:

Words they were saying like 'Castilán' in their speech:  
They warned us by signs to be gone when the logs charred:  
So we turned from them down to the smooth beaches:

The boats followed us close in: we departed:  
Afterwards there was a *nortē* with fine haze:  
We stood for Potonchán through the boil of the narrows:



There they attacked us crossing the green of the maize fields:  
Me they struck thrice and they killed fifty  
And all were hurt and two taken crazy with

Much pain and it blew and the dust lifted  
And the thirst cracked the tongues in our mouths and before us  
the  
Sea-corrupted pools where the river drifts:

And we turned back and the wind drove us to Florida:  
There in the scooped sand in the withered bed —  
There by the sea they encountered us threatening war:

So we returned to the islands half dead:  
And Córdova did die: and we wrote to Velásquez —  
Diégo the Governor — writing it out: and we said —

‘Excellence: there are lands in the west: the pass is  
‘Clean sailing: the scuts of the men are covered:  
‘The houses are masonry: gold they have: baskets

‘Painted with herbs: the women are chaste in love’ —  
Much else of the kind I cannot remember:  
And Velásquez took the credit for this discovery:

And all we had was our wounds: and enough of them:  
And Fonséca Bishop of Búrgos (for so he was called)  
President of the Council: he wrote to the Emperor

Telling the wonderful news in a mule's volley  
And not a word of our deeds or our pains or our battles:  
And Charles gone: and Joanna the poor queen stalled

In Tordesillas shaking the peas in a rattle:  
And Barbarossa licking his chin in Algiers:  
And trouble enough in Spain with all that

And the Cardinal dying and Sicily over the ears —  
Trouble enough without new lands to be conquered and  
Naked Indians taken and wild sheep sheared:

But as for us that returned from that westward country —  
We could not lie in our towns for the sound of the sea:  
We could not rest at all in our thoughts: we were young then:

We looked to the west: we remembered the foreign trees  
Borne out on the tide from the unknown rivers  
And the clouds like hills in the air our eyes had seen:

And Grijálva sailed next and we that were living —  
We that had gear to our flesh and the gold to find  
And an old pike in the stall with the haft to it slivered —

We signed on and we sailed by the first tide:  
And we fought at Potonchán that voyage: I remember  
The locusts covered the earth like a false shine to it:

They flew with a shrill sound like the arrow stem:  
Often we took the whir of the darts for the locusts:  
Often we left our shields from our mouths as they came:

I remember our fighting was much marred by the locusts:  
And that voyage we came to the river Tabasco:  
We saw the nets as we came in and the smoke of the

Sea over the bar: and we filled the casks there:  
There first we heard of the farther land —  
‘Colúa’ they said ‘Méjico’ — we that were asking the

Gold there on that shore on the evening sand —  
‘Colúa’ they said: pointing on toward the sunset:  
They made a sign on the air with their solemn hands:

Afterward: north: on the sea: and the ships running  
We saw the steep snow mountain on the sky:  
We stared as dream-awakened men in wonder:

And that voyage it was we came to the Island:  
Well I remember the shore and the sound of that place  
And the smoke smell on the dunes and the wind dying:

Well I remember the walls and the rusty taste of the  
New-spilled blood in the air: many among us  
Seeing the priests with their small and arrogant faces:

Seeing the dead boys' breasts and the idols hung with the  
Dried shells of the hearts like the husks of cicadas  
And their human eyeballs and their painted tongues

Cried out to the Holy Mother of God for it:  
And some that stood there bore themselves the stone:  
And some were eaten of wild beasts of their bodies:

And none of us all but had his heart foreknown the  
Evil to come would have turned from the land then:  
But the lives of men are covered and not shown —

Only late to the old at their time's ending  
The land shows backward and the way is there:  
And the next day we sailed and the sea was against us

And our bread was dirty with weevils and grown scarce and the  
Rains began and the beans stank in the ovens  
And we soldiers were thoroughly tired of sea-faring:

So we returned from that voyage with God's love:  
And they talked about nothing else in the whole of Cuba:  
And gentlemen sold their farms to go on discoveries:

And we that had fought in the marshes with no food —  
We sat by the palms in the square in the green gloaming  
With the delicate girls on our knees and the night to lose:

We that had fought in those lands....

and the eloquent Gómara:

The quilled professors: the taught tongues of fame:

What have they written of us: the poor soldiers:

We that were wounded often for no pay:

We that died and were dumped cold in the bread sacks:

Bellies up: the birds at us: floating for days

And none remembering which it was that was dead there

Whether of Búrgos or Yúste or Villalár:

Where have they written our names? What have they said of us?

They call the towns for the kings that bear no scars:

They keep the names of the great for time to stare at —

The bishops rich-men generals cocks-at-arms:

Those with the glaze in their eyes and the fine bearing:

The born leaders of men: the resonant voices:

They give them the lands for their tombs: they call it *America!*

(And who has heard of Vespucci in this soil

Or down by the lee of the coast or toward the Havana?)

And we that fought here: that with heavy toil

Earthed up the powerful cities of this land —  
What are we? When will our fame come?  
An old man in a hill town  
a handful of

Dust under the dry grass at Otúmba

Unknown names  
hands vanished  
faces

Many gone from the day  
unspeakable numbers

Lives forgotten  
deeds honored in strangers

‘That which I have myself seen and the fighting’..

## THE ARGUMENT



*OF THAT world's conquest and the fortunate wars:  
Of the great report and expectation of honor:  
How in their youth they stretched sail: how fared they*

*Westward under the wind: by wave wandered:  
Shoaled ship at the last at the ends of ocean:  
How they were marching in the lands beyond:*

*Of the difficult ways there were and the winter's snow:  
Of the city they found in the good lands: how they lay in it:  
How there was always the leaves and the days going:*

*Of the fear they had in their hearts for their lives' sake:  
How there was neither the night nor the day sure: and the  
Gage they took for their guard: and how evil came of it:*

*How they were dead and driven and endured:  
How they returned with arms in the wet month:  
How they destroyed that city: and the gourds were*

*Bitter with blood: and they made their roofs with the gun stocks:*

*Of that world's conquest and the fortunate wars....*

.....

# THE FIRST BOOK



*SO DOES a man's voice speak from the dream that bears his*

*Sleeping body with it and the cry  
Comes from a great way off as over water —  
As the sea-bell's that the veering wind divides....*

*Now is it Díaz in the Book —*

....where

lost in the....

Santiágo de Cuba it was: I remember....

Hoisted over the....

king's arms and a cross on it....

Cortés I mean and the pleat of his purse empty:  
And they made him captain: Duéro did: and the split-up  
Three ways and as for the Governor....  
slept....

November and warm in....

surf....

the dry winter:



Palms ragged with sea-gust....

all careened with the

Weed in the rusty chains and the keelsons splintered....

Bleaching with sun and the....

nights in....

elegant knees like the

Girls in Spain and the sand still hot from the sun and the

Surf slow....

wind over....

palm-trees sweeping the

Stars into darkness....

weeks....

waited....

the guns

Brassy in....

loading the cobbed maize and the pigs and

Powder enough for a....

ropes on the....

eight tons:

And we launched the last of them well out and the brigantine

Cocked in the poop like a Genoa....

sixteen horses:

Alvarádo's the mare the sorrel the big one:

Montéjo's the galled gelding: his rump sore with it:  
Puertocarréro's grey that the captain bought him:  
A fast dark chestnut horse of de Mórta's:

Ortíz the musician's stallion: well taught:  
Clever under the bit: the mare La Rabóna:  
The captain's hack that died of the foul water:

Láres the excellent horseman a strong roan:  
Gonzálo de Sandoval's La Motilla: the best of them:  
A chestnut bearing a white star: and the loan of a....

And we lay by for the beans and they told Cortés....  
Governor knew of the....

wild and the writ signed

And the sergeants out in the King's square to arrest him:

And the captain heard it at dusk and the wind rising  
And he ordered the lot of us down to the ships by dark  
And the chains short....

bucking the....

all that night....

Sentries at....

waked and beachward and still stars and the

Governor riding his white horse on the fish nets  
Big in the fault of the light and his men armed

And the palms back of him black and the leaves threshing:  
We cold on the dew-wet decks: yawning: our  
Mouths sour with sleep: the pimpling flesh

Crawling under the thin cloths: and at dawn the  
Captain out in the oared boat: and we hoisted the  
Jibs on the rest of them: getting the low airs: yawing

Wide to the ruffle of squalls and we cleared the buoys  
And we luffed up by the quay with the gear rolling  
And Velásquez cried to him there in his bull's voice —

‘How is it O my Compadre I see you go?  
‘Is this the right way to take leave of the Governor?’  
Hollow it was on the gale as a conch blowing:

And Cortés below there and the quay above:  
And he stood to the swing of the sea in the boat's stern  
Baring his head and the tune of his voice like a lover's —

‘Señór! there are some things in this sinful world  
‘Best done before they're thought of! At your orders!’  
And they stared across the water with no words:

So did we sail dragging the boat aboard:  
And we bought supplies at Trinidad and Havana:  
And Velásquez wrote to the said towns and he warned them

Blaming us all: and as for that shameless man  
Let them arrest the son-of-a-bitch for a traitor  
Shipping him down with the oats or....

‘given my hand this

‘Tenth day of December Fifteen Eighteen’:

And they came with the writ in their belts and their mouths  
dumb:

And Cortés was an eloquent man: skilled in orations:

And even the Governor’s messenger signed up:

And the town clerk had a quill in the ink for Velásquez —

‘That the hare was still as the tuft of a turf till you jumped him:

‘And the boar a suckling till you bruised his back:

‘And as for the Captain Cortés — Your Honor’s obedient

‘True man and a loyal tongue and irascible:

‘And better armed than the Constable’s guard or the Veedor

‘And peaceful at heart: and they feared he would burn the  
town!’

And they sent that off by a nigger for God speed:

And Cortés had a service of sound plate and a gown and a

Gilded knot to his shirt and his chain gold

And a smile for the troops with the orders....

month....

bound for the....

Burden of pork and we borrowed her rope and we towed her....

## THE SECOND BOOK



....So

Sailed we out from the Island to Cozumél:  
Winter it was and a wind and a swell rolling

*(10 Feb  
1519)*

And the stain of the foam on the long flank of the swells:  
And they gave us the signals for night with the swung lanterns  
And the chains came in: foul with the tatters of kelp:

And the bow fell off from the wind and the sails slatted:  
Shaking aloft: filling the bunt: the sea furrow  
Following under the drawn keel: land

High on the northward and the windy birds:  
And they told the pilot: the old man: the Comácho  
(Showing him wax on the seal and the ink words)

He should lie-to off the capes and Cortés would catch us:  
And he was a sea-going man: a native of Pálos:  
One that would trust God — but he'd try the hatches!

He said: 'I'll lie-to when I can't sail!'

And the capes went down and we took the sun for a bearing  
Keeping the breeze on her beam: and the windward stays

Stiff in the smoking chocks: in the chains: and the airs  
Swung east and the swells came in on the quarter  
Kicking her off: and he held her down as he dared:

So it went: and the fourth day and to starboard  
A low line like the blur of the wind on the sea  
And we worked her in with the oared boats to that harbor:

Shoals there were and the blue channels between them  
And the herons rising to the rake of oars  
And the wash under the dark banks in the tree roots:

We lay to leeward of that silent shore  
And the drip of the dew came down from the slack sails  
And the stir of mangroves when the wind was toward us:

All night were the stars above our faces  
And the smell blown seaward of that unknown earth:  
(The air of the unknown lands has a strange taste to it):

And the next day we....

gone and the coals burning  
And corn enough in the crocks and the thread to weave  
And neither a man nor a dog nor a hen nor the skirt of a

Running girl in the town: and he came that evening  
Feeling his way like the blind-man's boy with the cook:  
Ten ships on the oars and the anchors reeved:

The leads going like carpenters' hammers: the look-outs  
Thick on the chains and the ropes and the spars and the decks  
like a  
Sick flock waiting for sun in a rookery:

And he ordered us out of the bags of our beds and he lectured  
us —

'Did we think it was fox and geese we were there playing?  
'Did you pacify people taking their gold and their chickens?

'And these were nothing: a poor folk: and our way was  
'Far on to the west: and the gold was piled in the  
'Open fields in that land: and to learn patience:'

And he sent word to the chiefs it was their island:  
And the girls ran in the village like tame boys:  
And their breasts were bare and their brown throats and they  
smiled at us:

And the orders of Captain Cortés were not to annoy them....

Trees toss in the....

dunes: how the surf was dumb the  
Inaudible thunder....

for a Cuban coin

Or a new skirt or a cake....

  how the gulls would come  
Drifting to windward: how the wiry turf would  
Smell of a strange herb and a strong summer:

I remember the dry leaf shook in the shudder of surf:  
I remember the gulls would veer where we were hidden  
Wheeling to leeward and the wing-tips curved...

Girl's comb or a....

  sea far out with the tinned  
Hazy glitter of gales on it....

  so was....

  days:

And the anchors up and they told Cortés there were Indians

Come from the mainland — how they stood amazed:  
How they would thumb at a man's beard: and the signs as of  
Heavy toil and of bowed backs they had made: and their

Hands to their hearts: and their spittle to their eyes:  
And he stared at the dazzle of sun where the day leaned and he  
Spoke — 'It may be in the lands behind are

'Men as we are: Spaniards: naked: gleaned the  
'Garnered earth for a slave's grist...' and he pulled the  
Lug of his lip as his way was — 'for we needed an



‘Ear to our skulls to sleep among these wolves:  
‘And the aid of a tongue to our teeth to drive these asses:  
‘And the slave will speak as his lord: and if God would there  
were

‘Ways to be saved in that land:’ and he sent Ordás  
And two boats and the guides and twenty men  
And a cheap chain in a box and assorted brass goods:

And he bound him out for a week: and a letter — ‘Gentlemen:  
‘I am at Cozumél the island: if you that are  
‘Slaves there in that nation live I send to you:

‘My ships will stand to the shore till the eighth noon:  
‘The price of your hides herewith: God aiding I  
‘Sail for the land beyond as the sea proves it:’

And six days were gone and the next and they waited  
And neither an Indian’s boy nor a dog but the shore and the  
Bird’s wing and the pelican’s cry and they sailed and

Crossed and returned: and the wind fair: and we boarded  
And broke sail: and the tide was in: and we ran for it  
South by the shoals with the wind on the port quarter:

And but for God we had gone: but de Escalánte  
Hove to and his ship down and the bread was  
Banked all in that ship and her masts canted:

So we returned: God's mercy defended us:  
There it was as they watched from the low land  
Looking to northward where the shallows ended

An Indian boat came south by the sea channel  
Riding the roil of the surf: the stem down:  
Standing the stern-lift an old naked man:

Lean he was of his great age and bowed with it:  
His hair white on his eyes: his breech clouted:  
And he leapt in the suck of the wave where the ship  
grounded:

Wet with the sea: the weed on him: crying out —  
And the sound over the surf — 'Diós y Santa...'  
And lost as the wave came down: and our men shouted:

And the officers came to the shore: and we all ran:  
And they told Cortés and he came and stood and he saw the  
Brown skin and he cried — 'Where is this Spaniard?' —

Yes! and the old man on his naked haunches  
Crouching as Indians by the surfy shore  
Wearing the yellow rag: the lean jaw of him

Grey with the hair-lock: and the sand before:  
The sea past: answering — 'I am he!'  
He spoke slowly saying the words like a foreigner —

'When I was come to the long sands to the sea  
'No sails were riding: the heart failed in me then:  
'I said: thinking it: God has forsaken me:

'Now I perceive that God will be my friend:  
'I am Jeronimo de Aguilár:  
'Priest I was in the time: from Darién we

'Sailed: striking on stones the beams started:  
'The wind drove hither: we were seventeen:  
'Now in the ending there are two to part:

'Long have I dwelt in the land where your fortune leads  
you:

'I have interpreted many tongues: I have read the  
'Painted rock by the roads where the dead are eaten:

'My two hands I have laid in the springs in the beds of  
'Water: my tongue in the bitter rinds: I have broken the  
'Sweet bones of the hare and she has fed me:

'I dwelt before you in those lands': and he spoke:  
And Cortés was dumb and we brought salt for we feared him  
And shoes to his feet and an oil and he was clothed:

And we caulked the ship in the one night....

steering by

East and north: and the 4 March: and at midnight

Gale from the....

wash....

the boat gone....

morning veered

South and the swell on it....

cape called of the Women....

Hove to in a bight with an iron aft....

Bellies of stone and stone breasts and their limbs like....

And standing away out: for the shoals are flat

And the coast a lee coast if you catch a norther

And sand bottom and no stub for the gaff: and the

Smudge of the land up wind: and to west before us

Nothing: the sea-glare and the sunward glass:

And we stood west on the wind and the seventh morning

Wore ship to a shuffle of air and she slacked and the

Sea was brown and the bog-root on the water:

And we of Grijalva remembered the empty casks

And the corn and the river Tabasco and how they had brought  
us the

Roast fish on that shore: and we talked of trade:

And of gold from the god-trees — and instead they fought!

We poled in by the palms and the swamp brayed with them:  
And Aguilar in that ship: and he told the mangroves —  
Grinding it out — how we meant well and to pay

And to tell them the truth of God to their own advantage:  
And they made a noise with their mouths as a mule's let:  
And they rattled the rig of their bows: and that was their  
answer:

And the King's notary writing it down: and they sent us  
Words enough with the arrows: and we to the waist  
Fought in the sea-flow....

of defenceless men....

Fled and the naked fallen....

by that gate

Taking the city: and at dusk Cortés:

And he read the oath by a lamp and a proclamation

Saying the town was the king's town to defend and  
Die if we must: and the bats went up from the nettles:  
Nevertheless there was more done in the end of it....

And the night was in that city: and we slept:  
And the doors were stone to the streets: and I was wounded:  
I woke with the smart of my throat at the guard's step:

The shadow of roofs lay strong along the moonlight:  
The surf was faint far off on the sea front:  
And my head was clear with the fighting and no food:

And I watched the moths in the moon at their silent hunting:  
I thought then — with the pain of my throat and the winter of  
Moon over it — fear was in that country....

## THE THIRD BOOK



SO CAME we again to the sea water:

And our wounds we laid in the ravel of torn sleeves  
Larded — so did we lack all things — from dead men:  
And they sent to us over the marshes to make peace:

They were sick of the battles of horses! and that war ended:  
And the chiefs came down with a golden dog and some lizards  
And five ducks and of gold and the masks of men

(And the gold in that province is poor and the work flimsy:)  
And cloth ('for the common troops: for their excellent services:')  
And one score very superior women

('Not for the troops!' — and the town was skinned like a  
turbot!)

Young girls they were and well mannered:  
All of them clean: some said to be virgins:

And one was that Malinál of Painalla we Spaniards  
Called Marina and loved well: of women  
None had more honor ever at men's hands:

A tall girl she was and a straight-limbed:  
Her face smooth and pleasant to see for an Indian:  
Not embarrassed but frank-seeming and simple:

And Puertocarréro had her: and after him  
The Captain Cortés: and her own people obeyed her:  
And she knew the tongues of Tenochtitlán and of Cintla....

So did we sail on and the noon shade lay  
Sharp to starboard: standing to the equal winds:  
Water under the bow-wash green: the wading

Keel clean in the eddyless swirl of it: rinse of the  
Salt wake slaking the sea: and we came to the  
Outmost ocean: and the light was thin

And we saw the mountains beyond in the faint day:  
And they sang to him — ‘Cata Francía Montesinos!  
‘Cata París la Ciudad!’ as to say

There were the lands beyond where he should lead us:  
There were the waters — ‘Do van a dar en la mar!’  
And the odor of shallow surf was on the sea:

And the wind swung with the light: and we heard the yardarms  
Back to a breaking wind and the sails flatten:  
And the air came cold against the creaking spars:



Sea ruffled with squalls: ships scattering:  
And we held her northward as the weather wore:  
Heeling the gusts: her head down: the hoists slatting:

Standing with morning to an island shore:  
And the wind was toward us and we knew that place:  
We few — Grijalva's soldiers that before

Sailed in those waters where the low sun paces —  
We did remember: and with sideways eyes  
Sought and yet looked not in each other's faces:

(So do those men upon whose sky arises  
Signalled by solemn bells the ominous star  
Turn to each other with the same surmise!)

And we stood: and they saw us how our eyes were darkened:  
And a voice cried out from the ship — 'Men of Grijálva!  
'Veterans! You of the fights! Look to your hearts!'

And we heard them laugh in their hands: and the voice of  
de Ávila

Filling the slack of the surf like a boy's bugle —  
'Did they eat the tongues from the root of your throats like  
calves?

'Have they taken the words from your mouths Veterans?' —  
screwing the

Sneer in the twist of his teeth: and the wind suddenly  
Fresh out of that shore and the smoke moving:

And the smell under the smoke of the burning blood:  
And the bitter odor of death: and Alvarádo —  
'Why are you silent Ávila? What have we done to you'....

And we worked in to a....  
fathoms of....  
shelving bottom

And no hang for the hooks and a leeward shoal:  
And he beached us under the banks in the breaking water:

And we built oasts of the wilting weed to our shoulders:  
And the heat was great on the dunes: it was Good Friday:  
The heat of the sand was strong where the sun rode:

And they brought us bread and the sweet plums were ripening:  
There we slept: and at dawn on the second day  
When the mist rose from the smother of surf and the light came

Men were among us of other dress and of faces  
Proud and with blunt brows: of great stature:  
Their garments woven of thread: and they moved gracefully:

And they carried staves in their hands of a green plant:  
And they smelled a rose as they came: their Indian servants  
Driving the flies from them: lifting the silver fans:

And they turned their faces among us with no word:  
And we saw the look in their eyes that they smiled together:  
And they bowed and laid their fingers to the earth:

And they brought us gifts as a burden for many men —  
A wheel like a sun and of gold and great as a cart-wheel:  
And one as a moon in silver: and a helmet

Spilling with....

shaped like lions and their parts....

And golden monkeys and a golden....

scornful and

Natural looking with stone eyes and the carving....

And all of it worth by weight in the....

pesos de oro:

And we could not speak for the wonder of these things:  
And he that was first and of fine dress and the lord of them

He stood alone on that shore on the steep shingle  
Facing the sea: and he spoke: and the sound was harsh and was  
Dry like the cackle of quick flame with the wind in it:

And the girl Marína spoke it to Aguilár:  
And Aguilár interpreted — 'Montezúma  
'Emperor over the earth and of those stars:

'The sun is toward him and the altering moon:  
'He has beheld your shadows in his houses:  
'His are the lands: the glass of the sea knew you:

'Now does he send you from his endless thousands  
'These and this treasure: in Tenochtitlán  
'Armies are harvested like summer's flowers:'

So did he speak and he pointed with raised hand  
Westward out of the sun: and Cortés was silent  
And he looked long at his feet at the furrowed sand:

And his voice when he spoke was a grave voice without guile  
in it —

'Say that we thank him well: say also  
'We would behold this Emperor:' and he smiled:

And the voice of Marína cried in the sea fall  
And they stood on the dunes and were still and the sky back of  
them:

And their plumes moved in the wind as the tree tosses:

And he that had spoken — 'Proud and ignorant man!  
'Hardly now is your heel's mark on these grasses:  
'The grooves of your ships go down to the sea bank:

‘Already you name that king! West of the passes:  
‘Westward of Xícho and of Ixuacán  
‘And the salt plains and the corn plains and the pastures:

‘West of the city where the earth-mound stands:  
‘West of the burning and the woman mountain:  
‘There is his town: there is Tenochtitlán:

‘The clean wave runs among the island flowers:  
‘Ancient is all that earth: a long-used dwelling:  
‘The dead are silent in that ashy ground:

‘Old are the gods there: — in the stone-made shelters  
‘Utter the dry bones their unspoken names:  
‘The locusts answer in the summer nettles:

‘None have conquered that land...’  
and they: as they came to us....

## THE FOURTH BOOK



‘THAT he had no writ nor right to lie in that country:

‘That His Honor’s commission was well-known — to trade

‘And return with it (viz. return with the cash money):

‘That His Honor and all their gentlemen’s honors had made

‘And won and secured (with share for share to Velasquez)

‘Adequate quotes and were quit and were well paid for it:

‘That their farms were unmanned and their wives as they hoped  
(but the backs of the

‘Cuban boys were quick at a man’s toil

‘And a straw will do to stopple an empty flask:)

‘That many were dead of them even now with their loins and the

‘Stones and the sticks and the arrows and such tools:

‘And they had no ease at all in that war and no joy of it:

‘That he ought to return forthwith to the island of Cuba:

‘That he (Cortés) was the governor’s man to obey him:

‘That he had no title to rest as he well knew:’

And more of the like sort: and the Captain played at it  
Pursing the nib of a No on his lip: and he started and  
Let pass: and he paused as a man persuaded:

And that was the sign: and we of his own party  
Pushing the governor's men with our knees — we shouted  
And raised banners in air and our naked arms and we

Cried out we were copped of the dice and were down  
And had lost the blood of our lives in a jew's venture  
Trading for gold: and here was an unknown ground

And a land to be taken: and as for the sums spent —  
What were they to a new land? and we cursed at him  
Asking him what we were: what men —

'Did we come to the gate of a ground like this to return from it?  
'If he had no writ of Velásquez's hand let him find one!  
'Let him establish a king's town for the birds

'Taking his writ from the Emperor Charles and the spiders  
'And damned to Velásquez's deed!'

And our speech prevailed with him!  
And he founded the town of the True Cross with a sign-post:

And he made a gallows of wood and a good jail  
And the rest in ink with an eloquent text for the mortar:  
And the jail he gave to the governor's men: and they lay there

Two nights: and their gall turned gilt like a story:  
(Ah what a salve is gold to console the mind!)  
And the City making him General-in-chief for Wars with a

Fifth (and the lick of the public dish on the side)  
Of any and all or gold or goods or discoveries:  
He to precede: and so done: and we signed and

Sealed and delivered and gave: and we gave enough!  
And even so there was more: for he besought us  
Seeing the state of grace he had in the governor

We should enlarge the Emperor's ear with our thoughts: and  
Offer our loves: and lay our lives to his measure —  
And speak of the Captain Cortés as our hearts taught us:

And so we did as he said: for the wind threshes  
And the thrush must dance to the wind: and we drew stems  
And it fell to the Captain himself to write: to Cortés:

And he lined the ink on the page: and he cried — 'Remember  
your  
'Deeds Castilians!'  
and the sand was strewn —

'Holy Cæsarean and Catholic Emperor!

'We the least of Your Majesty's subjects: used  
'Long to the wave-lift: wind-led: sea-suffered:  
'Beached now on this last land: we salute you!



‘We sailed to westward from the Island Gulfs:  
‘Bore three days outward on unmeasured ocean:  
‘Came to the shores before-seen: saw thereof

‘Certain and good towns: forests: the land low:  
‘And we fought them off by day in the tramped straw:  
‘Thence we sailed westward as the water showed:

‘And there came to us down to the grounding sea in the dawn  
‘Those that uttered a new name! (And our mouths are  
‘Sick of the standing meats and the stale water —

‘For the springs in Your Majesty’s lands are a dry drouth  
‘And the food is an eaten food and still they devour it  
‘And they drink the drench of their fathers’ loins and their  
houses are

‘Limed with the dottle of dead bones and are sour  
‘And their speech is fallen to women and old men  
‘And cheapened and base in the coin and the gilt scoured

‘And the shape of a pound will pass at a few pence:  
‘And our backs are turned from those lands and from these  
waters:)

‘And now is the new world toward us in the west!

‘We are as men and without food and the daws are  
‘Feeding before them in the orchards! Now have we  
‘Found how the way goes up: and the roads lawfully:

‘North by the rock have we chosen a ships’ town:  
‘With our heels we have quartered the earth for a church and an  
arsenal:

‘We have staked the sunrise on the eastern ground:

‘Latrines are ditched in the dry shale and a market:  
‘The house of the judge is squared on the left hand:  
‘Everything stands as a town should: and the carpenters

‘Pencil the oak: the lime burns in the sand-pits:  
‘Water is channeled with good joints and the vents made:  
‘Here shall the ships lie in: and we by the lands: by the

‘Sun: to westward: marching:... and already  
‘Mallets have started the loud beams: therefore we  
‘Pray your aid and arms to our hearts’ strength —

‘We that to west now: weirdless: by fates faring  
‘Follow on star-track: trust have we neither now:  
‘Traceless this ground: by the grazing deer by the hare crossed:

‘A king’s name to our road: and the beckoning boughs  
‘Lead but with onward arms to the wind’s ending:  
‘False-followed is moon-path also: the mountains

‘Stand long on the stone of the sky like illegible  
‘Last inscriptions of departed kings:  
‘The sun misleads us into night: men

'Nameless: secret: of unknown hearts: drink at the

'Streams before us: and abandoned fires

'Flush on our roadways with the morning wind:

'Few we are to march in the great sky

'And the wild swing of the moon and the wandering nations

'Silence before us and the sea behind:

'The sun stands to our west at the endless shades:

'Only the great hope we have of that country

'Heartens our ominous thoughts now: therefore we pray you

'Stay our hands with the arm of your strength: be unto us:

'Take you these lands! — lest the lean swine devour them

'And our deeds be lost in the earth and our times done....'

And he named Velásquez in two words: 'how had

'Fonséca Bishop of Búrgos by God's Grace and

Inscrutable Providence President of the Council

Pledged to the said Diégo Velásquez his (say)

'Niece and the deal was for loot in the new countries:

'And we that should win them to walk the ruts for our pay!

'And rot in the bleeding fields and die with our guts out!

'The old inherit the earth and the young fatten it!

'After the wounds: after the war's done

‘The old ones sit with the itch of their stones and the rattle of  
‘Age in the rake of their throats like the sleet in the stubble  
‘Bounding the new-won lands by the bones of the battlefields!

‘They weep for the dead with their mouths and the wet comes!’

And we proffered the Captain Hernán Cortés to his love:

‘How he was a right man and His Majesty’s humble and

‘True servant in God and he ought to be governor

‘Guarding the new-saved souls and the coast and the profits:’  
and

Praising his good looks: and we wrote enough:

And we signed in the run of our rank and we sent it off:

And the sons of scorpions ran her in to Havana:

And the Island knew in a night: and Diégo coughed like a

Hooked horse when he heard of the heft of the platters

(For all that treasure was borne in the one ship

And little there was with us but the cut and the cantles:)

And he sent with troops and with smooth talk but they slipped  
him

Running it north and east in a good blow

And they sailed the Bahamas Pass by the Pole and the Dipper:

So they came to Tercéra and Cádiz Roads:  
And the King was gone and they fell to the Bishop of Búrgos!  
But time and our deeds and His debts and the weight of the gold

And the cold and the late spring and the French all worked for  
us:

And His Majesty came to a Just Conceit of the Truth:  
And he talked of nothing for several days but our Services:

And Gentlemen praised the cloth: and the silver moon:  
And the gold sun: and the monkeys in gold: and the Indians:  
And as for the Bishop of Búrgos — at la Coruña

The roofs are green with the rain and the sea wind!

## THE FIFTH BOOK



AS FOR ourselves—the ship went out with the evening:  
All we knew was the last sun on the sail-cloth:  
We stood a long time watching on that beach:

And the low night came in from the sea: and we lay by the  
Ashes of grass and the journey of stars went over us:  
Slow too from our sleep went out that sail:

And some dreamed of the ship: — and some woke to it!  
I was the watch that night: I heard the water  
Swirl as an oar would or a great fish roll:

And afterward there was the creak of a rope pulled taut:  
And I called: and we beat on the constable's drum: and they ran:  
And their heels scattered the quick coals and we caught them —

The bread aboard and the oil and the fish and the lanterns  
And water enough for a long voyage in the tubs:  
And he judged them there by the flare of their wicks and the fat  
of their

Own oil — ‘that the Pilot Gonzálo de Úmbria  
His feet be struck from his flanks:’ and the thing was done:  
And they bungled the blow in the bad light and the drum-beats

And Juan Cerméño and Escudéro were hung:  
And Cerméño fell and they choked his chaps in the halter  
His face in the sand like a drowned dog’s like a drunkard:

And Cortés was sick of the night’s work: and he called  
And he ordered us out and to take arms and the horses and  
March — ‘and as for the damned town let it fall to the

‘Hurt and the halt and the traitors at heart and their corpses!  
‘Let flies inhabit it! Why should we breed worms  
‘With the clean towns to be won and the west before us?’

And more of the like: and we marched by the night surf  
Keeping the sand dunes and the water’s sound....

And he was a subtle and secret man of his purposes:

We lay at Cempoála the soft town:  
And messengers came from the fleet by night and the word was  
Four of the brigs were full and the best foundered —

‘And what with the rotten pitch and the rust and the worms  
‘And the wood cracked as it was and the wear of the rigging  
‘Feared much for the look of the lot but deferred....’

And Cortés was astonished and stared like a dumb nigger  
And the next day there were more: and the next: and the end  
of it

Nine gone and the tenth a launch and the pick of the

Bleeding fleet for a duck-pond: and he — Cortés —

Still amazed and still talking of Providence!

And that was the break of the back for the Governor's gentlemen:

They stood in the streets at night like a French mob

Scaring the Indian girls with their words and their strutting —

'Did he think he was Jesus Christ? Did he think by God

'He could bring them out like a levy of goats to be gutted

'And fed to the idols and burn their ships and their steel was

'Yellow with rain and their guns worse and the country

'Undiscovered and not known and between them

'All the waters of earth and the westward heaven

'Near over the hills and it might be

'The last wall of the world: and they few left and to

'Follow the plunging sun in the uttermost oceans

'And die and be drowned and their souls lost and bereft of the

'Sweet air and the Spanish earth and their ghosts

'Wander forever the waters of no sail

'And no shore but a wind and a wave's motion!'



That was the weight of their wild breath: and they railed at him  
Cursing the bed that bore the bum of his mother  
And damning his father's fork for an ape's tail

And himself for the two figged get of a goat and the brother of  
Whores and a hare's scut and a bull's gear  
And a gull and a kite: one first and another:

And he there in the dark of the huts hearing it:  
And all at once was their breath gone: and he spoke:  
They turned as at the stick crack the scared deer —

'Your Honors are eloquent men but your good-will chokes you:  
'The husk of your love is brittle to your teeth:  
'You will eat more softly when the shell is broken:

'As for your words — they are true: there is no fleet:  
'And you say the land is a dangerous land: it is dangerous!  
'That this is the world's end westward: it may be

'This is the world's end and the serpent rages:  
'That our steel rots in the rain: Aye! and our skins do:  
'That the place of our death is not known: it is strange

'But men die and unknown and the crows think of them!  
'That this is an undiscovered and dark land:  
'Of doubtful and ignorant gods: peopled by Indians —

‘This is an undiscovered and dark land:

‘All this that you say is true: but the words of your

‘Fear are not true: there is one ship: man her!

‘Take what you will of the store: a keel’s burden:

‘Spain is east of the seas and the peaceful countries:

‘The old tongues: the ancient towns: return to them!

‘Why should you waste your souls in the west! You are you

‘Tell them you left us here by the last water

‘Going up through the pass of the hills with the sun:

‘Tell them that in the tight towns when you talk of us!

‘The west is dangerous for thoughtful men:

‘Eastward is all sure: all as it ought to be:

‘A man may know the will of God by the fences:

‘Get yourselves to the ship and the stale shore

‘And the smell of your father’s dung in the earth: at the end of

‘There where the hills look over and before us

‘Lies in the west that city that new world

‘We that are left will envy your good fortune!’

And he walked between them and went and no man stirred:

And none spoke of the ships again in that army:

And they chewed their tongues in their mouths like shame  
girls:

## THE SIXTH BOOK



SO DID we pray: and took arms: and we marched: and  
We left that sea-remembering land and last known  
Ocean: bore bones' weight each one and his arms:

Meagerest burden of beggars our backs had:  
And we ate of the grain of the grass for our mouths' meat,  
Water we found: our bread also was fasting:

Ever before us lay vast earth secret with  
Sun with the green sound with the singing of grasshoppers:  
The earth was still against our living feet:

No man of us all that knew that land nor the  
Way of the trees in it: neither were waters known:  
Neither the customs of the wind: our shadows

Entered the silent shadows of the stones:  
And the mouse cried in his tongue: the cricket answered:

Ah but the mark of a man's heel is alone in the

Dust under the whistling of hawks!

Companion of

Constellations the trace of his track lies!

Endless is unknown earth before a man....

And we marched in the great plain under the sky-star:

Close footing in steep sun: narrowly

Laid we our feet along the wheeling light:

And the plain went up: rock-colored: barren:

Roses and wild plums over the waters:

Far south of us much snow: as in Aragon

Over the level winter: and we caught

Evening in that place: the smoke standing

West with the wind: with few stars: and we saw the

Knees of mountain on the naked land:

Great wall it was on the west: and at daybreak

Climbing: and had the rain up the barrancas:

And had a pass and a town and the troops lay there

Stewing the thin drizzle on green wood:

(And the smell of the smoke is sour in such places)

And we ate nothing or ill: and we ate roots: and our

Bellies were bitter for bread among those mountains:

So did we follow the waters: and we stood

The third day clear of the unequal ground:  
Rocks over: snow hard in the crevices:  
And the hawks were under us turning and far down:

A man could look for a great space under heaven  
Standing above there: he beheld sea water:  
He beheld the sun on countries he had left:

That way do they stand on the ships at Sáltes:  
The sea opens before and the tide takes them:  
They watch the Spanish land and the fields falling:

They watch the ship-road and the drifting wake....

Then came snow from the pass and the wind under it —  
The southwest smoking over ragged acre:

The sun like a stale moon with the stringy scud:  
We could not see for the swarming cold: and our thigh-bones  
Bitten with steel: our beards rimed: stung with the

Strong sleet: weak in the blood from the islands:  
And the cloth we had to our ribs was the raw steel:  
We coughed in the wind all night by the flat fires:

(This mountain has no descent but to eastward:  
The west is level country: as from ocean  
Climbing the shadow of the crag the eagles

Wheel into sun and inland and are low  
To shallow gorse: their vans run over flowers:  
Darkening leaves: the bees start from them: so

Was land to westward level from that mountain —  
A withered earth and an unwatered meadow:  
The winter's ashes were scattered on cold ground:

This was the wind's dryness: the north that bends the  
Boughs up elsewhere with its rain here wandered  
In shapes of dust as a ghost and the drought was shed from it:

I say that the whole country moved as on the  
Cloudy steel the image of hands passes over:  
So on the plain the image of wind wandered:

Neither were wells nor streams but the salt only:  
The roads were as tracks: a goat's rut: *despoblado*:  
Even the soil had a bitter taste and the stones of it:)

And we came by day among the desert gods:  
And we came to the towns at dusk and the dogs yelping  
And the smoke of the corn on the coals and the parched pods  
and the

Old men waiting by the shadowy dwellings  
Turning the reeds of their necks as they stared among us:  
Talking as crows do — 'Look now!'

‘At a step...’

‘And a great battle of men indeed in their hunger!’

‘Bearing these arms they march to the King Montezúma!’

‘Or are they as gods — each man as a hundred?’

‘Nevertheless in Tonochtitlán there is room for them:’

‘Ho! Aye! there is room within on the altars

‘And without in the ditches of water is much room!’

And they sniggered as children with shut eyes: and they called  
to the

Indian bearers bending their brittle nails

And they made the obscene sign with their mouths mocking  
them:

And Cortés — shouting it — ‘Whose is this mountain pale?’

And the old men: changing their voices: shielding their

Lids from the faint light and their fingers shaking —

‘Montezúma the king’s land! Of our people

‘Clear to the sea’s edge was the river corn:

‘And they came from the west with their hard eyes and their  
eagles:

‘Once we were short of spears: once were the fords deep:  
‘Now they take what they will in the whole land:  
‘They rut in our daughters’ beds: it is evil fortune:

‘We have no name of a man now: our ancestors —  
‘They that planted the orchards: they were Totónacs:  
‘I that speak this was a free-born man:

‘Beware of the land Colúa you that go to it!’



## THE SEVENTH BOOK



*TO THE place called of the Red Land....*

and between the  
Fields valleys of great depth: and went down and  
Marched in the valleys:  
and the pools were green a

Copper water: and stank: the earth powder:  
No stalk of a leaf in all those valleys:  
We alone there and the whispering ground:

The great heat of the sun on us: neither shadow:  
Neither shade of the cracked rock in that cañon:  
The tree of the sun on our necks: the burning saddle:

So came we to strath's end: lanterns:  
Cricked walls: heaped plaster: smell of the  
Old men: of the straw: the dogs scattering:

The dusk under that street: the moon withheld:  
A thin smoke of the moon on the high barranca:  
Mountains after those mountains: and

these tongues telling us —

These voices — ‘There are the Tlaxcaláns!  
‘There does the way go in by the earth openly:  
‘And these are a violent and harsh race: and a man may

‘March by the sword in their lands: and they fear no one —  
‘Only they hate the Colúans and wage war:  
‘And they wear at their wrists the skull-bone of the crow:

‘And a man may enter in violence by that door  
‘And go as he can and march by the strong places  
‘And pass them by in the sun and with blows and with swords —

‘Not by night nor by doubt nor the dark sayings:’

And we slept and woke with the stars above the cañon:  
And the moon fumbled the blurred helms: the braziers

Burned in the black of the wind to a man’s hand:  
And we marched: and the night was westward: and we followed:  
And the sky returned to us covering stars:

we had the

Light first in the leaves: we saw Tlaxcála  
Under the shallows of the sun: we saw the  
Grass-fires floating in the windless hollows....

So stood to the mountains for that dawn:  
And the trees came out of the night and the light under them:  
And he marched us down by the brook by the bracken shaws:

And we chewed the slip of the alder for dry cud:  
Dragging the guns: whispering: foot-sound: creak of the  
Cracked spoke in the rut: hearing among the

Waters voices as a man were speaking:  
Night-smell under the smell of the fern: the light  
Rigid with silence in the net of trees:

And a wind touching our mouths: and the grass whiter:  
And our hands were stiff with the taut ropes and the lag of the  
Oaken fellies and the stubborn withes:

So came we by day to that savanna:  
Vast meadow it was: with rush rooted:  
Rank with the dock-weed: there the cricket sang:

Wold was that country under heaven: woodless:  
A crow's pasture and a bitter ground:  
Téhua they called it: stones of that city stood:

There: covering earth: countless: we found them:  
And we lay in the scald of the creek and the cane between  
Waiting for sunlight: and we heard the sound

As a surf far off in the fog (and the wind weakens  
And falls and silence and the slack sail shakes:)  
And our ears were deaf with our blood and we could not speak:

And we made signs with the swing of our pikes we should break  
them and

Head them off by the pools and to stand west:

And they came like dogs with their arms down: and their faces

Painted and black and with death's eyes and their breasts

Quilted with cotton and their naked arms:

And the hard hammer of sun on the gold: and their crests like a

Squall of rain across the whitening barley —

We that were mortal and feared death — and the roll of the

Drums like the thud in the ear of a man's heart and the

Arrows raking us: rattle of metal: the goad

Stuck in the fat of the hand: and we standing there

Taking the sting of it....

No! we were good soldiers —

Nevertheless it was ill weird for a man

One against many on those dangerous plains

And the sea behind and the hills: and we chocked the cannon

Ramming the stone to the stock and the stiff blaze of it

Flat to the grass: burning the gorse with the powder:

Taking them clean in the bellies with link chain:

And they near in the sun: and they took it shouting:

They threw dust in the air: when the smoke lifted

The dead were vanished from the bloody ground....

Then indeed did our hearts fail us to give  
All force and the Indians still in their numbers:  
The dead gone: the plain dark with the living:

And still Cortés and the horsemen had not come:  
And we must have died by the day's end in that meadow:  
And our throats were thick with the dust and our mouths dumb:

And even as we were overcome they fled!  
They ran in the rut of the field as the flush and the scatter of  
Quail out of corn: and we stood and were near death

And we hoped nothing of these things: and the battle  
Wheeling to westward: and the fighting ceased  
And the swords fell: and suddenly there were the galloping

Horsemen before us the thud and the shuddering beat and the  
Shod feet on the turf and the shout and the quickening  
Kick of the calk on the clay and the sound of it easing and

Gone by and beyond....

that was a victory!

That was a sight to have seen in a man's time!  
Domínguez driving the mad horse with the stick of his

Lance straight in the air and his mouth wide:  
Alvarádo behind him: the horse of Cortés —  
The flea-bitten rump that he had and the froth on the bridle —

On straight legs: scuffing the dust up: crazed with the  
Smell of the spatter of blood: his neck twisted —  
That was a sight to have seen in a man's days!

And we lay in the dust where we stood: in the bloody litter:  
And we had the words in our dry mouths and the wine in us:  
And our hearts were big as a bird in a girl's fist:

And we would have slept where we lay....

and they came behind us

Bearing us other war!

And we were one

And they were ten to the one of us: and they died:

They fell by scores and they came again by their hundreds:  
And the blood of our veins was run in the earth with our vic-  
tories:

Day after day we fought and we always won!

And we sent them word they were well wealed: and to think of it:  
And they came again with their crow's cry and their feathers:  
And they fought us back in the brake: and our bellies sickened:

And we saw soon how our bodies were near death  
And how we should take that battle with our lives  
And pass them by with our bare bones into Mexico —

And nevertheless we fought them lest we die:  
And they came at last in the mid-watch: the Modórra:  
And we saw the maize-field moving in the night:

And we rode them down in the furrows of plowed corn  
And the tuft was over a man's knees when he mounted  
And the leaves like a lash on his wrists: and we reined the horses

Driving the stiff of the steel to the squealing clouts:  
And that was the ending of one war: and they made the  
Peace with their backs: and the old men came out to us....

Never were any in all lands that laid their  
Loins to the quilt with more comfort than we had  
Wounded and sick as we were and our blood faint:

And that was a good and a loyal and true peace:  
And they brought us in by their town and their hempen garments

Painted and red: and we came by the water trees

And the green look of the land and the girls their arms like  
Harvest withes about the shocks of flowers:  
And all laughing with words: and they brought us garlands:

It smelled of the sun and of dust in that town:  
They sprinkled the dry earth with the odor of water:  
The shape of the shadows faded from morning ground:

And we laid us down in the doors where the moon haunted:  
The broom-water smelled on the streets of the heat to come:  
We woke with our knees across the stones of dawn there....

So was it those days: dead summer:  
The rains off for the year: and clear: and nights like  
Nights north in Navarre: no drums to it:

Sun enough and a floor and the rushes dry:  
The rattle of wind in the leaves: the sun's shadow  
Cool in the corner of noon as a dog would lie:

The long talk in the dusk — 'of us Spaniards:  
'Since to believe we were not gods would degrade them....'  
Of Montezúma — how were our weapons sand

And our wars were lost in the wind if we sought that nation:  
And none had conquered that city with man's arms:  
And they themselves in their time had thought to take it:

And they took dust: and the drought to their mouths: and the  
smart of the  
Smoke in their gullets for all good:

of Cholúla —

How was it treacherous thin earth and artful

And false and with gods unsure: the dead ruled it:  
And nevertheless there was way west by that city:  
But as for themselves the wells of their eyes were fooled with the



Shadows of sorrow in that place: and the spittle of  
Dreams in their eyes as a sleight: and their fathers knew this:

And we marched by day to the south and we saw the hill  
And the god's flame on the hill and the town Cholúla....

## THE EIGHTH BOOK



THE falsifiers of things seen!

the defamers of

Sunlight under the name of our sky!

and we slew them:

*And who are ye to be judge of us? Ye that say....*

And their treasons were open and shameless and many knew  
them:

And they thrust their hands through the guises of this world as a  
Negro's hand in a girl's breast: and they drew the

*The Mas-  
sacre at  
Cholúla*

Truth as a bee's-comb from a wall to serve them:

And the world they said was a dream and a stale:

and they offered us

Sadness to suck for our thirst — as a maker of words to an

Idle woman at dusk that her heart be softened:

And they would have destroyed us in that place: the debasers of  
Leaves! of the shape of the wild geese on the waters!

Calumniators of evening! priests! betrayers of

Light in the hood of our eyelids! they that discredit the

Silence of death on the dry mouths — and they trace the

Sign between the eyebrows of the dead:  
Maligners of evil they were: of the pure ill  
Like a crystal of quartz in the heel where the flesh will tread it!

And they told us Tenochtitlán was a whitened filth and a  
Great guilt in the air: and deception: and falseness:  
And filled with the salt of the dead as a reed with pith:

And they themselves had beheld it —  
and we saw their  
Eyes like sorcerers and the uncertain  
Shadows behind them on the height of walls:

And they said to us — ‘Have you not known? Have you not  
heard?’  
And they said ‘Has it not been told you from the beginning?’  
‘Has it not been said from the founding of the earth?’

And they said we should enter and come and lie within  
And dwell in trust and with faith sure —  
and we knew the  
Odor of death on their tongues as a thawing wind!

And we caught them under the cleanness of dawn:  
and we slew them!

*And who are ye to be judge of a man's fault?*  
They stood about us in the town Cholúla

And the sun was under the sill of the east and he called to them  
Shouting the words out: (and the stones were wet —  
I see the young-leaved morning on that wall)

‘Was it the loyal love of their hearts that sent them  
‘With such smiling and glad mouths? Or perhaps the  
‘Poles they had cut for our necks and the withy pens!

‘Did they come to deliver our feet from the falls and the traps  
‘And the barricados of stone they had built? In what god did  
they

‘Trust for reason? Let them trust the grass!

‘For indeed he had read in their hearts as a split cod  
‘And he knew their souls by their slime as a snail his journey —  
‘How they had salt for our flesh and a boiling pot:

‘But that which our hands should pay them they had earned!’

And they cried as sheep to be sheared and some confessed it:  
And the fault was their lord the great king’s: and to turn our

Wrath upon Mexico: there was the string stretched:  
And Cortés on the stone and the sword drawn — ‘Now had they  
‘Done with words? For the tongues in their mouths were of  
dead men!’

And even then they would smile for their hearts could doubt  
him:

They stood as deer in thicket and the sun

Puzzled their eyes with the blenk and their heads were down....

Afterward they were blind with the raw blood:

They died slowly with much pain like serpents:

Our hands were lame with the sword when the thing was done....

*And who are ye to be judge of us...?*

## THE NINTH BOOK



‘THE road back has been covered with many winds:

‘The pinch of the five toes in the dust is illegible:

‘Before us are other lands and a new winter:

‘(Already on rusty quills are the crows threshing:)

‘Nevertheless we go on: we are not returning:

‘Strange as it is that men: wanderers: wretched:

‘Deceived often: misled: their way lost: thirsting:

‘March on in the sun! But so the desire has

‘Strength over us... and the love the love of this earth....

‘(All the crows of the sky have crossed our fires:

‘It is a bad sign: a chill winter: dangerous:

‘At this season they fly high-up and in silence:

‘Their shadows vanish like years on the flat plain:)

‘And we that are strong: we march on descending the

‘West with evening: and the leaves of sage

‘Taste in our mouths of the labor of living men:

‘We have bitten the acid oak and the harsh holly:

‘We have said — “This is a good land! we will dwell in it!”

‘(But who has trodden the way the crows follow?)  
‘Like the nail of a woman in love is the twig’s smart  
‘Stinging the lips!’

And we came by the land and the col:

And we took the willows for night once and the farms:  
(The stars over stubble) and we took the snow:  
We took the cold for the one night and the larches:

When we were come to the pass and the down-going  
That land was under us! There were the longed-for skies!  
We stared as drunken men in dusk: as those

That watch for Teneriffe: and the sun rising  
Raises that mountain and they stand amazed  
Seeing the mark so near them and so high:

To speak clearly with right words I say the  
Land lay at our feet as a close or orchard  
That keeps within walls and is green and the plow labors:

Not with another ruggedness nor more the  
Rock encircles as they say that water  
Where the chafing Rhone lies silent on his shores

Than there those mountains: and we saw the straw  
Cut in the swaths and gilt and the valley still as  
Meadows in July sun where the bees throng them:

(O living-kindness of God's love that permitted our  
Sinful eyes to behold these sights and wonders!  
How have we thanked thee with words even! how little!)

And we marched down by the hoed fields in the sunlight:  
We had forgotten the hunger and hard days:  
The town lay on the lake like sleeping gulls:

The stone dyke divided the water: tasting the  
Liquor of melons we marched by the lake road:  
The king sat on his gold chair awaiting us:

They bore the sun at his forehead on willow poles:  
Nobles and lords of that rich land supported him:  
Even the straps of the shoes of his feet were golden:

So we were brought between the posts of morning:  
And he turned and he stood in the gates and he said smiling --  
'Malinchi! these are your houses: these your doors:

'Yours and your brethren's: you may rest awhile:'



## THE TENTH BOOK



*O HALCYON! O sea-conceiving bird!*  
*The bright surf breaking on thy silver beaches*

And the life goes out of us leaving the chucked sherds!

Leaving an old man's memories to leach  
Like a cock's jewels of gravel and worn thin  
With the sleepless caul of the heart and hard and clean:

Leaving within the eyes behind the fingers  
Back of the soft lid and the scarlet vein  
The harsh flash of the steel where the light lingers!...

Leaving the slag in us....

leaving us those days....

And I see well as from dark into light lying here:  
The lint of the broom-straw turns in the sun's ray:

The cocks sing in the heat: there are cakes frying:  
The drinking water drops from the hung gourd:  
The rafters circle with the dozing flies:

The dogs rise and cross to the cool of the urine:

I see well in the dark of the room — as through shutters the  
Sun is white on a street and the shadows sure —

As men move under tree-boughs and the sunlight  
Leaps like a cat on their gilt capes and clings  
And is swept off by the next branch: shunted....

So I remember it: yes: and the evening bringing the  
Doves down from the air: their wings steep to it!  
And thou Colúa! and the paddles rinsed in the

Clear pools of thy sun! I cannot sleep for the  
Light under my lids of thy bitter water:  
I cannot sleep for thy cries and the walls keeping the

Leaning weight of thy sun by night and the autumn  
Smelling of flowers as spring does: (wearing the  
Cotton sleeves we were drunk and the wind caught in them):

And the girls they gave us for love with the scented hair:  
The green light through the leaves: the slow awakening:  
How there were many and small birds in the air then....

We were like those that in their lands they say  
The steers of the sun went up through the wave-lit orchards  
Shaking the water drops and those gold naked

Girls before them at their dripping horns!  
And they ate the sea-doused figs with the salt taste:  
And all their time was of kine and of sea and of morning:

So did we lie in that land in the long days:  
And they gave us a king's house to our heads and we dwelt in it:  
And the house was smooth and of clean walls and so spacious

And well made and with lime and the stone set there was  
Place for us all and the guns and our goods and our Indians:  
Each man his mat under him smelling of

Lake grass and of leeks and an ell in width  
And his painted cloth with the corn and the cones and the aloes  
(For in that land there were men skilled in these images —

Such as sit with a day's sun in their laps  
And they stare in the eyes of the trapped hare in the stubble:)  
And the rooms smelled of the sweet wood like a chapel:

And all were of plank and were ceiled and of pinned lumber  
And painted with scarlet beams and their out-walls burnished  
And made to shine as a good coin: and some were

Built to the water and the light returned  
And spilled up from the float of the ripples and ran on the  
Wall's glare as a flame where the sunlight blurs it:

And some were shadowed to the cool canals:  
And they poled in with their slow skiffs and their melons  
Leaning against the gaff's end and the slash and

Drip of the stroke came back: and the cries sending the  
Sun-bright birds up — and the beat of sound  
Would pass and float on the stream and the wings settle:

(For all the isle was channeled as that ground  
That takes its stars from Istria and their eyes  
See first the new moon toward the Tuscan Mountain:)

And the town rang with the clang of oars and the cries:  
And they brought the corn through the water-streets and the  
faggots:

They poled in with the heaped fish: the hides

Smelling of oak: the bowls slobbered with maguey:  
They stood in the cool of the dark arcades in the market:  
Many there were of them: tall men with the hank of the

Coarse skein on their wrists and their thumbs parting it:  
Sellers of split fruits: of blue stones:  
Of brass: of the nubile slaves — their hands bargaining:

Stroking the breasts up: and the thing was shown:  
Merchants of sweet nuts and of chives and of honey:  
Of leaves of dock for the eyes: of a calf's bone for the

Gloss of the hair as the hand draws it: of dung  
For salt for the tanning of leather: sellers of yarn:  
Old men with the sun-bleached hair and the bunches of

Herbs: of lettuces washed cool: of garlic  
Dried brown on a withy of plaited grass:  
Sellers of cooked dough by the coal-fires larding the

Stained skirt with the spittle of burning fat:  
Those the makers of ropes: those that shredded the  
Silken down of a seed and their fingers fastened the

Stone to the twist of it turning the scarlet thread:  
Sellers of good dreams: of blue clay for the  
Baking of gods: of quills of the gold: of hennequin:

Sellers of beetles for red dyes: makers of  
Stone masks of the dead and of stone mirrors:  
Makers of fortunate knots: magistrates in the

Swept porch — and they kept the names of the year:  
They took the tax on the red stones and the herons:  
They judged of the levies of salt: venders of syrups:

Of harsh drugs for the old from the coupling of hares:  
Of dry seeds: of sweet straws.... many and  
Strange cries that they had.... and they stood wearing the

Knotted and white cloths like capes and they went with  
Strong knees through the heat of the sun and their thighs were  
Straight and their bellies like knuckles of bronze: and they set  
their

Heels in the sand of the earth as a man riding a  
Wave's back in the sea and their sex was naked  
And stained with the salt of the sun like a golden hide:

And the tall girls there were in the wind and the way of the  
Sun was under their knees and the way of the wind  
Like a hand over them: smoothing the scarves out: shaking an

Odor of noon from their skirts like the odor at midday of  
Clean cloths to bleach on the water stones  
(And the butterfly opens his slow wings:) and their skin like the

Rain's fragrance of water: (one alone  
Returns from a shadow of plantains and her mouth  
Secret with lust as the honey of black combs):

And their loins were heavy with love and they laid them down  
Under the lids of their eyes as under a garment:  
They gave themselves in the green herb and the flowers:

Ah how the throat of a girl and a girl's arms are  
Bright in the riding sun and the young sky  
And the green year of our lives where the willows are!

How they were slender with strong breasts and the light of the  
Leaves over them! How there were tall men  
And the wading lake to their wrists and their wet thighs

Dabbled with sunlight: and they drew the nets  
In the green sedge of the shore and they came singing:  
The sea-film silvered in the lifting web:

Ah how the land was a good land! and the king of it  
Rich and with young wives and with gold and his gardens  
Sounding with water: and he went to drink

At noon at the grooved stone by the sheds and the jars were  
Choked with the float of the sun: and he ate simnel  
And sweet cakes he ate and a kind of partridges:

And none knew his ways or his times with women:  
Silent he was and not seen and he came by  
Dark: and his desire was in their limbs as an

Odor of plums in the night air and they wakened  
Stretching their arms out and between their knees  
Delight like the sun's mouth and the water's weight:

And all his house was sounding as of trees  
And the leaves of the trees were dark and a dew came down from  
them:

Even at noon the dew fell like an ease of

Dusk to comfort a man's eyes: and the ground was  
Trodden with naked heels: and he kept beasts:  
And birds he kept in a grove and the green loud with the

Locusts and golden and shrill wrens and the bees  
In the split hive of the wall and the names of serpents  
Curled in the painted vessels at his feet:

And he kept marks on a stone for the sky's turning —  
For the way of stars in the trees and the moon's toil:  
Niter and salt he ate from the quick earth:

They brought baskets of sweetened seeds and of oil to him:  
They cried to him Lord! my Lord! my great Lord!  
They came with naked feet and the small voices:

Ah how the land was a good land! and the doors with  
Morning with many leaves with the clean odor of  
Water sluiced on the night stones: (and the core of the

Broken melon smelled of a girl's robe:)  
We woke scenting the slot of the heat on the air:  
We rinsed our mouths in the sun: by the listed boats

Purging ourselves to the coarse sand the glare of the  
Sun was a cleanness of pebbles: far out  
The fisherman leaned to his line and the silent herons:



And we lay under a lift of the green and their gowns were of  
Spun twist in our hands: the hollow groin  
Beat with a small heart: we heard the trowels

Strike on the brick of the roofs like silver coins:  
We heard the whistle of tamed birds: to our tongues  
Our mouths were sweetened with the scented ointment:

And we drank of the milk of the aloe and were drunk:  
And the words hived in the heap of our bones and we praised the  
Taste of a bitter leaf: we praised the sun

And the earth for the odor of men in its hot days —  
For a woman's color of pink shell or the pock of the  
Purple vein at her breast as a bruise made in it:

We praised the trampling of sun as a gilt cock:  
Our hearts were singing as hammered bronze and our mouths  
with

Sound as the corn is where the wind goes: and we mocked the

Shape of love with our thumbs: we cried aloud of the  
Great sky: of the salt rock: of the land....

And nevertheless it was not so: for the ground was

Silent against us: on our foreign hands  
The dust was a solemn and red stain: our tongues were  
Unskilled to the pulp of their fruits as a language of

Sullen stones in our mouths: we heard the sun in the  
Crackle of live trees with the ears of strangers....

And they passed with their cries at dawn and their deep drums:

And we saw them go by the stone courts and the cages:  
And all clean and with coarse lime and the temple  
Steep in the reach of the sky...

and the boy was slain!

The belly arched to the stone knife: I remember  
They sang and were glad as a small child in the sunlight  
And they ate the limbs for a feast and the flesh trembled....

## THE ELEVENTH BOOK



*THE smoke for a sign my people as the churn of  
Crows above death's burning on the beach....*

And the shadow of terror arises on this world as a  
Cloud out of the north-east: and death is  
Everywhere like a resemblance....

sleeping we heard the

Sound of the lake in the water streets that weather:  
Waking we thought of the narrow dyke and the bridges!

Ever behind us by night was the water's breath:

Before us: uncovered in the windy ditch: their  
Teeth uttering slow sand the slain  
Unnumbered dead were dumb and their eyes hidden:

Hearing the ceaseless waves we were afraid!  
We rose in the dark of the mid night with no stars:  
We cried to the walls of the town we were there waiting!

The lake-sound answered us! fools — we wished in our hearts to  
Live in the land and the town safe and secure in it:  
We thought in our fear their king should be our guard —

‘Why should we suffer the dark chance or endure the  
‘Skill of the moon on our dreams or the fortune’s changing?  
‘Seizing this king the silences were sure!’

And we marched down by the torches in dark way:  
And we found him under the garden trees and his shoulders  
Shone in the torchlight in the leafy rain:

He stood there: answering —

‘.... gladly if to go

‘Now were our ordinance: for we were men  
‘Sent from before-time: and the thing was known

‘Long since in his land and his doors were ready:  
‘We were those men they knew of that should come:  
‘And therefore our terror was ill-taught to defend our

‘Bodies and fear death: for death was dumb  
‘And mute and of lawful life as an herb or as beasts or  
‘Rain is: and savage as stones: and humble:

‘And death also was ours and our bread and to eat as  
‘One out of many corns: and as one among them  
‘Tasting of silence and of smoke and peace:

‘Seeing the bones of a man have many hungers

‘And need death as the doe salt: and fear is

‘Witless among us and its cricket tongue

‘Thin as the whistle of dry straw and as tears of

‘Salt dried on a stone for bitterness: let us be

‘Warned and taught of the true word and to hear the

‘Birds of death in our trees as the god sent them:

‘Neither to stand in violence and with force:

‘For we came to his house with loud cries and as enemies!

‘How should it serve our fortune to make war

‘Or to bind his limbs with our steel? Though our metal held him

‘How should we hold death? There were many doors:

‘And a man spills from the cup of his bones as spelt —

‘From the shape of stone on his wrist as running water:

‘Nevertheless he would follow as we led:’

And Cortés was wild with the night’s work —

‘had we brought the

‘Whore of death to our beds and our house to serve us?

‘How should we profit by these deeds? And we thought our

‘Ills were done! And the wheel of our luck turned!

‘And the toss was tamed to our hands! But it was not so

‘But evil fortune and the last and worst and

**‘Great fault of those wars!’**

**and so as he spoke the  
Die fell: and we lost our lives: and we lost the  
Land for it after: and the town was sown as**

**Dry salt with the bitter seed: and with slaughters  
And much death in that house: the thousands slain....**

**Sleeping among those walls we heard the water  
Treading behind us with its ceaseless waves.**

## THE TWELFTH BOOK



*WHEN have the old forgiven us these things  
Or the new lands or the sun on them?*

.... we being lords in that town and our hearts insolent!  
And the word came up there were ships hove-to in the offing:  
And we knew well the Governor's men had the wind of us:

And we knew Fonséca was rooting in that trough —  
The fat brach that he was: the breeding monk's-head:  
And Velásquez was in it with two tongues and the soft of the

Fry in his bib like a glibbed boar in a bucket:  
And their writ came up by the road with the ink sanded —  
How we were traitors before God and His Son and the

King Charles and the Holy Church and the Spaniards and  
Him Bishop of Búrgos and him Velásquez  
And one thousand four hundred they had of the

Brave Biscayans and horses and all that brass  
And the new bows and the iron balls and the powder:  
How we had entered without law nor with act nor

Writing nor good writ nor with warrant: how we had  
Crossed seas to that land and had made discoveries:  
How we had marched to the new west and had found a

New nation of new tongues and had suffered a  
Strange land and ways and wars and had dwelt with **them**:  
How we were traitors and lacking in right love

And right care of our own kind and begetters of  
New sorts as we were and inventors of wind  
And our souls guilty as his was that in Hell

The horned flame muffled and his voice within —  
'And as for our pride in our great deeds we should swallow it:  
'Nevertheless they accepted our lands for the widows!'

And he called us out on the Square — such as would follow him:  
And Alvarádo he left in the armed town:  
And we marched east by the hills to Cempoála:....

The Biscayans they were! — and we brought them down!  
And they fought us the one night in a wet rain:  
And we were the fewer of men's names but they counted the

Sparks of the flies for our gun-matches: and they were  
Ten to the one of us: and as for matches —  
As for powder we used pikes: and lame with the



March down: and we set the flame to the thatch and they  
Fell like the burning bees where the winds toss them:  
And Narvaez (he was my Lord's man of Velásquez

And Captain-General of that lot and he lost an  
Eye by a light spear and he lay fettered)  
He cried to Cortés in his vault's voice — 'to have fought

'And won with unequal numbers — he must send it a  
'Great feat of his arms!' and Cortés answered him —  
'As for winning he thanked God and these gentlemen:

'But as for the taking of him (Narvaez) that was the  
'Least thing he had labored in New Spain:'  
And he made them a speech from the drums and they changed  
masters:

And the field was ours and the land and our lives safe in it!  
And we lay in the meadows with no watch: and our pride was  
Ripe as wine in our hearts: and we slept —  
and the day was

Not yet dark on the hills when the luck denied us!  
For the news came down of a great war on the causeway —  
How they had opened the dry ditch and had prised the

North door by the gelding's stall and the house was  
Heaped full of their dead and of ours seven:  
And Alvarádo had written it —

‘As for cause there was

‘No cause but a trap and the fools had set it:

‘And they came in on a clear day to dance:

‘And he gave them the usual king's writ to assemble:

‘And they left their arms in a priest's house in the passages:

‘And he saw they were many and great chiefs and he knew the

Plumes they had were of war: and he saw their plan:

And he locked the gates: and the guns and the corporals slew  
them:

And nevertheless they were made mad by that slaughter:

And they came like wasps in swarms as the wind blew:

And the ways were full of their slit mouths and they fought like  
Wild dogs: we should ride well if our tongues would  
Talk to his living ears for he lacked water:’

And Cortés was dumb with his rage and he walked among us  
Praying to God to punish a violent fool!

And Alvarádo should bleed and burn and be hung for it:

And he swung heel to the mare and marched and at noon it was  
No stay but to stand nor at dusk neither  
Nor rest by road-side: and the time was June

And late light in the loft air: and the evening  
Smelling of sad leaves and we marched casting a  
Thin shadow as glass: and the road beneath us

Leading as last year's road by last year's passes:  
But the look of the land was changed from the last year:  
And the towns empty and changed and the cook-wood scattered:

The kettles blackened with the charring ears:  
And we saw their smokes on the near hills for our coming:  
And our way went up with the smokes: and our bellies feared it

Hearing the Spanish metal and the drums  
And the dry bleat of the wheels and the silent mountains!  
And nine days out of ten the nags stumbled:

And the tenth Colúa: and we saw that ground:  
And there where the throngs were once along the gardens  
Now did the bird rise from the shaken bough:

And void wave where the boats were then: and dark: the  
Sea-slap only and the late bird's wing:  
The night: the windless water bearing stars:

And we marched in by the hard road: and the ring of  
Stone to hoof-shoe was the iron sound:  
And we saw walls in the bat's light and a blink of

Lamps and entered and our own were round us  
Whispering words: their mouths white by the lanterns:  
The swung light upward on the jut of brows:

Meager they were in the small light: a man could  
Taste the salt of their tears on their silent tongues:  
Their eyeballs glittered to the gunner's matches:

And the place smelled of the doused ash and of hunger and  
Sick men's nights and of death: and the dead were slack in the  
Bloody straw of the earth as a coat is slung: and he

Said (Alvarádo) 'The Captain's back!  
'It's a quiet city Captain!' and he: hoarse —  
'And a green grove for apes and a jakes for jackals!

'And not so did I leave this town!' and he bore the  
Mare round on the short rein and he left him:  
And we weary with long way and the swords like

Scalds across us and the heavy metal:  
We were the sleepers leaning where we could:  
And we lay down as the dead do under heaven:

And the walls above us: and the watchmen stood:  
And nevertheless there was no sound in that city —  
Only the roaches in the blistered wood:

Only the she-mouse hunting in the thistle:  
We laid us down as dead men and we slept:

... eyelids covering many stars....

## THE THIRTEENTH BOOK



... And this was

Late watch of that sky and the Ram was set and

Night lay westward with her stars:

and waked

Foolish with sleep with a man's cry and the step of

Steel on cope-stay: and the day was breaking

Bringing the water smell along the stones:

The Pole Star faded from the fading Wain:

And we woke in the straw in the half light: and León was

There above us on the brink of wall:

And Sandoval: and the silence....

and we rose

And we went on the wall by the three rungs and we saw it!

Mother of Heaven there were many men!

Even in Spain at Sevilla when at dawn they

Pray and the bread is broken and the tens and

Thousands stand there in the narrow streets

And they kneel down to the bells are not so many —

Neither so silent! and our eyes could see them  
East and south by the great square and their crests were  
Floated in lake-fog: and their naked feet

Hushing the earth: and stood: and when the west was  
Light the faint stir....

and they saw the sun!

Mother of God! in age now: forgetting the

Wars in Mexico and all men's tongues and  
Cries and shouting and the clamorous words I  
Hear those voices shouting and those tongues!

And they came like wolves in the streets: and the water birds  
Rose with the shouting: and we heard the wind in the  
Shrill nipple of stone as a wasp: and we heard the

Slings as scythes and the deep drums and they kindled the  
Cook-room walls to the up-wind and the court was  
Strawed with their throws as a threshing floor: and we killed them

Hacking their hands from the scarp: and there came more:  
And they tore their hands on the slash of the steel but they  
reached us —

We that were lame with the weight of our own swords:

And only night was our aid then: and for sleep we  
Pleached roofs with the rack of the spears: and we knew there  
was  
No help but the king's help or to flee for it:

And our mouths were bitter with the bloody rheum:  
And we stood by the kettles and many were near death  
And our wounds cold and we talked of Montezúma:

And we called his name from the burned sheds:  
and Cortés was  
There among us eating and he spoke —  
'That we save our throats for sucking up our breath!

'That we keep our mouths for the meat seeing there go to  
'Death journeys of such haste! that our fault was  
'Then when we took this God's-butt for our hold and

'Pledge and hostage: that our fears had brought our  
'Fears upon us: and had lost the town:  
'And our lives were to lose if they circled the west wall:

'That the laws of this land were foreign and not ours  
'And they laid death as a wafer on their tongues  
'And he had no hope of the harvest of that ground:

'That men were fools to take the god among them:  
'For a man's part is to labor and fear death  
'And die in pain as he must and in his hunger:

‘And the gods were of other lands: nevertheless  
‘As our will was: and our wisdom: let us do....’

And the smoke coiled on the cold stones: and we went by

Dawn on the wall-head there: and Montezúma  
Clad in the gold cloth: gilded: and he smiled:  
He climbed by the stair and smiling and they slew him:

He stood on the stone in the gold in the first light  
And the war below: and they fought like dogs in the ditches  
Whistling and shrieking: and we heard a sigh as the

Sound in leaves when the storm ends and the pitch of  
Rain runs over and far on and the wind is  
Gone from the willows and the still leaf drips:

And all at once there were stones and the sky hidden:  
And he stood in gold not falling: and he fell:  
The lances blurred in the sun as a wheel spinning:

His eyes were lewd with the strange smile: and they yelled as  
Fiends in Hell and as beasts: and when we thought it  
Least for the bitter fighting he was dead:

All that day and into dark we fought:  
And we lay in the straw in the rank blood and Cortés was  
Hoarse with the shouting — ‘... for a man was wronged and a



‘Fool to suffer the Sure Aid but to best it and  
‘Fight as he might: and he prayed all of us pardon  
‘And grace if he spoke our hurt: but we were men:

‘And we saw well what weapon was our guard:  
‘And now there was none: only the night: and the ways were  
‘Barred before us and the ditches barred

‘And the dykes down by the banks and the water-breaks  
‘Open and armored and they held the roads:

‘And nevertheless we had the choice to take them!...’

## THE FOURTEENTH BOOK



*BY NIGHT: by darkness: turning from the sun....*

And he ordered us out by the south wall and the horsemen —

‘And none were to follow him grudging by that road:

‘And no man’s name was needful to those wars

‘For the women in Spain have borne and still bear soldiers....’

And de Ávila answered him — ‘Soldiers and captains too:

‘And we well deserved that he should tell us so!’

And he ordered the gold from the stone-room for the troops:

And Narvaez’s people were weighted as great lords:

And nevertheless there was mettle enough to lose of it —

Seven hundreds of thousands of pesos de oro

And the pelts of birds and the jade and the painted cotton —

The rape of Mexico: the riches of that war —

And it lay in the sift of the ash and men’s feet trod it:

And he ordered a bridge of planks for the broken causeways

And men to bear it: and they drew the lots

And we lined up in the dark court and the straws were  
Drawn by candle: and we saw the rain for the  
Flame spat to the wick: and León had lost and

Alvarádo: and they swung the gate  
And we marched out by the still street and the smell of the  
Rain was rank with the rotting blood with the taint of it:

We talked little in that time: ahead the  
Walls came toward us with the marching feet:  
And the street turned and the sound fell: we held the

Metal muffled: and a man could see to the  
Man's shape before in the rain: and still there was  
No sound but our own and the town was sleeping:

And we knew the causeway by the water silt:  
We heard the rain in the reeds....

and the rear-guard halted

Sending the word up that the planks were split

And the bridge bogged at the last break — at the water —  
And all that a man could do they....

and we heard the

Sedges sliding: and we heard a call

And a call beyond and fainter as of birds  
Waked in the rushes: and again the rain and  
Silence and the water sedge: and the word was

Wild among us and the bridge still stayed:  
And one Botéllo: a bowman: a maker of charms —  
And they found in his boxes after as a shape of

Hide and of flock-wool: stuffed: as a man's parts:  
And a book with signs and written — 'Shall I die?'  
And afterward — 'Thou shalt not die!' and farther —

'Shall I be slain alas in the sad fighting?'  
And under it — 'Thou shalt not!' and again  
'So shall my horse die also?' and the sign —

'Yes they will kill it!' — and this fool Botéllo  
Crying beyond in the night and his voice hoarse —  
'Sorrow I see like smoke of rain descending!

'Death's seal is made in the flesh of your foreheads:  
'Your limbs Oléa lie in a shallow sod:  
'I too....'

and we heard de Mórla's horn

And the rear-guard answering and Alvarádo:  
And all at once there was some word they were shouting:  
And the ranks were broken: and we cried to God

Driving the fore-guard on: and the bridge was out: and the  
Stones were shrill in the thick air and the arrows:  
We saw the water where the dykes went down:

We drove as cattle drive against the barriers  
Bearing before us: and the plunging horse  
High on the heap: and the wheels: and the dyke narrow:

Blinded with darkness: and the ditch before....

*(They fell in the road and were not raised: their cloaks  
Muffled the stone: in their hands were their broken swords:*

*In the ditches of water they drowned and the sand choked them:)*

We struck their arms from our knees in the blind fighting:  
By the dead we came over: and the dead were most:

And the morning light was rising on that sky:  
And we came to the land there: and we saw the lake  
Silent and under mist and the city lying

Lost and behind us as a man should waken....

And we were but few men standing and the rest to come:  
And we saw where five came toward us: their heads naked:

Running: bloody with many wounds: and one was  
Alvarádo with the stumbling step:  
And after these was the road: and no man other:

And the morning rose and the low sun: and we wept  
Seeing so few alive that left so many:  
Seeing that once-loved city....

Yes!

and we set our

Eyes to northward: and León was dead  
And Láres and de Mórta and there died of  
All eight hundred and the powder spent:

The guns gone: the gun-men gone: to ride the  
Wounded horses: to eat earth: drums in the  
Ear of the night in the yellow lands beside us:

And the whistling and jeering: and they held the scrub:  
And they drove us up in the dust with the jack spears:  
And they herded round us in the field Otúmbe:

And the plumes sawed in the sun like maize: and we feared  
them and

Fought blind and with God's grace we came out of it:  
And we lay beyond the mountains for that year....

## THE FIFTEENTH BOOK



*CONQUISTADOR....*

And we marched against them there in the next spring:

And we did the thing that time by the books and the science:

And we burned the back towns and we cut the mulberries:

And their dykes were down and the pipes of their fountains dry:

And we laid them a Christian siege with the sun and the vultures:

And they kept us ninety and three days till they died of it:

And the whole action was well conceived and conducted:

And they cared nothing for sieges on their side:

And the place stank to God and their dung was such as

Thin swine will pass for the winter flies and the

Whole city was grubbed for the roots and their guts were

Swollen with tree-bark: and we let them go:

And they crawled out by the soiled walls and the rubbish —

Three days they were there on the dykes going —

And the captains ill of the bad smell of that city

And the town gone — no stone to a stone of it —

And the whole thing was a very beautiful victory:  
And we squared the streets like a city in old Spain  
And we built barracks and shops: and the church conspicuous:

And those that had jeered at our youth (but the fashion  
changes:)

They came like nettles in dry slash: like beetles:  
They ran on the new land like lice staining it:

They parcelled the bloody meadows: their late feet  
Stood in the passes of harsh pain and of winter:  
In the stale of the campments they culled herbs: they peeled the

Twigs of the birch and they stood at the hill-fights thinking:  
They brought carts with their oak beds and their boards and the  
Pots they had and the stale clothes and the stink of

Stewed grease in the gear and their wives before them  
Sour and smelling of spent milk and their children:  
They built their barns like the old cotes under Córdoba:

They raised the Spanish cities: the new hills  
Showed as the old with the old walls and the tether of  
Galled goats in the dung and the rock hidden....

Old.... an old man sickened and near death:  
And the west is gone now: the west is the ocean sky....

O day that brings the earth back bring again

That well-swept town those towers and that island....









